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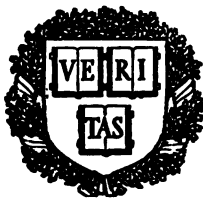
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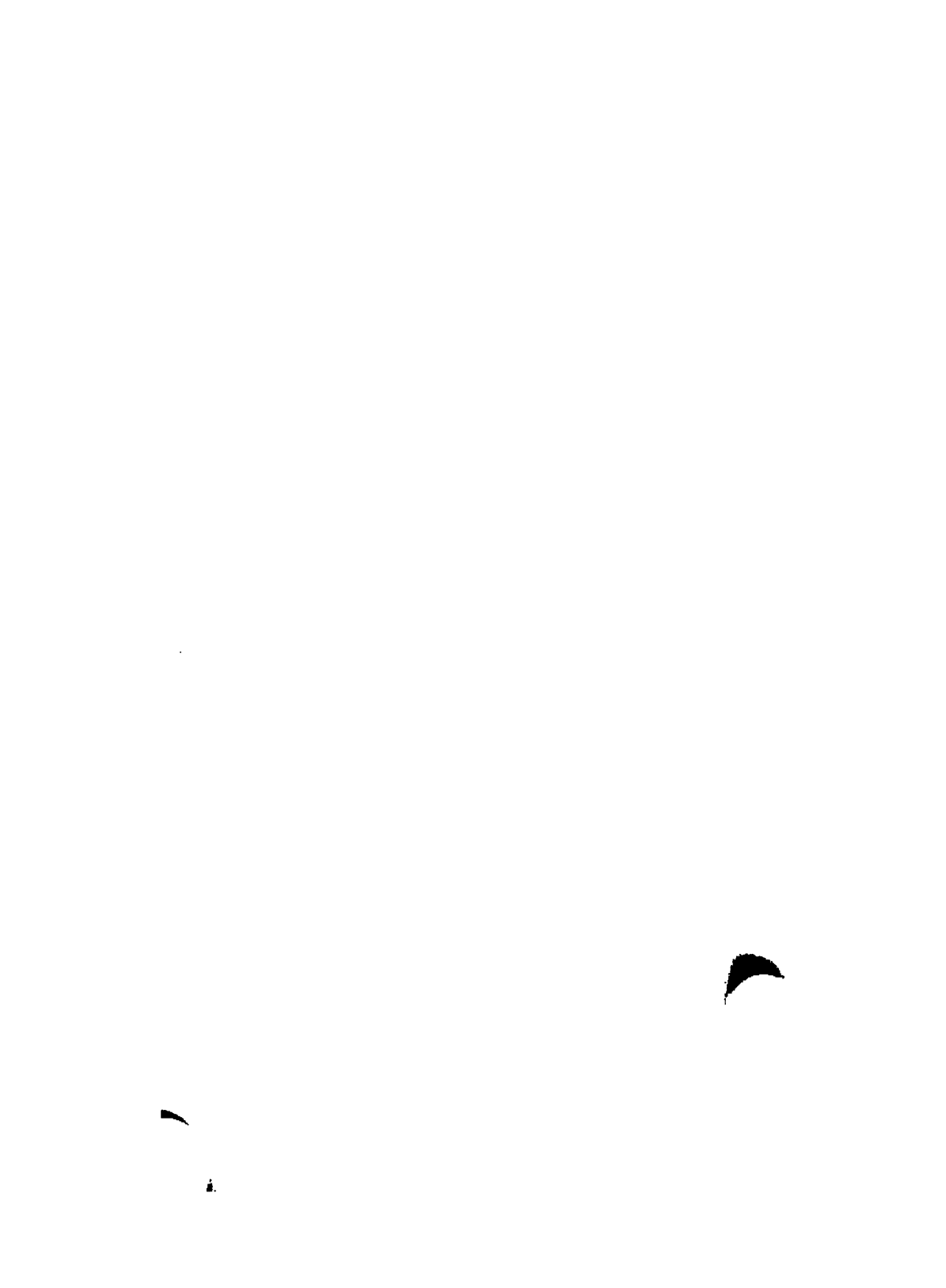


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Q U E E N M A B.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF "NATHALIE," "ADELE," ETC., ETC.

THREE VOLUMES IN ONE.

NEW YORK:

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY,

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PART I.

JOHN FORD.

CHAPTER I.

QUEEN SQUARE, Bloomsbury, is a quiet place. Securely it sleeps within the shelter of the neighbouring Law and the shadow of a few old trees. It hears, indeed, the subdued roar of Holborn, and the distant hum of the city ; but it hears them as in a dream, and, heeding neither, it slumbers and dozes on. Its lot is cast in peace and silence ; rude carriages disturb it not, for it has but a few inconvenient outlets, and intruding feet seldom profane the grass that grows freely between its ancient flags. It has seen better days—that a glance will tell—but the ghost of departed greatness protects it from the last humiliation of decay : it is not populous. It has ceased to be fashionable, but, thank heaven, it is still “genteel.”

The houses suit the place ; they are old, brown, substantial burgher houses—they have never been palatial mansions. They deal little with the vanities of life, but mind their own concerns, and see to their little gardens behind, and look at their green and quiet square in front, with its damp-stained statue of that Queen Anne who took and filled her father's throne, and was called “Good.”

To persons of a speculative turn who see such a place for the first time, it is a perfect godsend. If they enter it from Gloucester Street, for instance, fresh from the turmoil of Holborn, they are struck with its quaint charm ; for one it has, and quite its own. To be sure, it is neither picturesque, nor pretty, nor beau-

tiful. It was never meant to answer any of these epithets—but then we do not look for beauty in great commercial cities; and who that is wise would wish to live in a picturesque neighbourhood, or would even indulge in conjectures concerning its inhabitants? But here the very absence of all that is brilliant or striking is a temptation. In that shady house beyond a student might roost and dream away a lifetime. In its sad-looking neighbour an invalid, to whom country air was no necessity, might pass through querulous years, and not be affronted with the cheerfulness of places more favoured. In this a miser might hoard his gold, and contrive hiding-places of his own. Or a disappointed man might hide his head from the world's cold scorn, and sink unheeded into his grave. But whatever the tenant might be, that decorum which seems innate in Queen Square would be expected to mark his habitation.

Now, it was precisely decorum that was wanting in Mr. Ford's house. It was that which made it look so singular and incongruous a dwelling. It had no business in Queen Square. It was as well built, as valuable a freehold as its neighbours on either hand, but they looked comfortable if not affluent, and Mr. Ford's house was decidedly shabby and poor. Their very plainness was suggestive of citizen comforts; they were homes where a hearty Christmas dinner could be served up, and whence a respectable funeral could issue, after gout and good living had done their work; but Mr. Ford's house, dingy and forlorn, suggested none but images of poverty or avarice. A miserly or a needy man alone could inhabit this desolate abode. Country poverty has its graceful aspect; weeds grow prettily amongst the loose stones, and moss does very well on a roof; we need not even trench upon ivy, which belongs to ruins, to make something nice and becoming of a dilapidated country mansion: but London decay is like London itself, rather grim, smoky, and dirty, and Mr. Ford's house was inconceivably dreary to look at. The doorsteps, that last stronghold of English cleanliness, were of a dull grey, and told of a negligent or overtasked maid-of-all work. The paint on the door was worn away in frightful patches of scarred brown. The handle of the area bell was broken, and the bell itself, when put in motion by some mysterious piece of mechanism, uttered a faint and ghostlike squeak. The curtains of the kitchen windows were yellow rags torn and never mended. The faded blind of the parlour window was of a common printed pattern; poor and miserable looked its Gothic arches that nearly met a rusty iron screen, savingly substituted

to the clear muslin of the neighbouring houses. The first floor, indeed, had a decent look. The yellow blinds were never raised—but, though yellow, they were whole; and everyone knew, moreover, that behind them there was a tale and a mystery; but the second and third storeys were even more conspicuous than the lower part of the house. Broken panes, mended with brown paper stuck on with wafers, were of common occurrence in those unfortunate regions; it was even said that sundry garments had there been hung out to dry. "But that must be a slander," as Mrs. Smith kindly remarked, "for had they not the garden and the back windows?" Mrs. Slater, who owned a house in Devonshire Street, took a less lenient view of the matter, and openly declared, "Mr. Ford's house was a disgrace to the Square, it was. And she did not care who heard her saying so. And she neither cared nor knew who Mr. Ford was."

Part of this declaration was very true. Mrs. Slater did not know who Mr. Ford was, and Queen Square was no wiser than Mrs. Slater. Some knowledge indeed it had, but of that broad, delusive kind which is almost worse than complete ignorance. This at least leaves imagination free; now to know a little is to be fettered in a most unpleasant manner. It is in some sort to be compelled to the labour of distorting, and not to be allowed the delightful liberty of invention.

Mr. Ford's house was his own freehold property—that everyone knew; he had also chambers somewhere, but what he did there none seemed able to decide. He led a dull, silent sort of life; his three boys, a grim servant-woman, and Mr. Ford himself, were the only persons on whom the shabby door ever opened and shut again. Visitors being unknown at Mr. Ford's, attention became all the keener: and Mr. Ford, a shabby-genteel man, with a step alternately depressed and elastic, his raw, scapegrace-looking boys, and Susan, who put no questions and answered none, became the legitimate prey of the inquisitive. Very little was made of them. Anyone could see that, though the boys outgrew their trousers and jackets, these were seldom renewed; that Mr. Ford's coat grew whiter at the seams, and his nose rather redder as time passed; and that Susan's temper, as displayed in her conversations at the front door, or from the bottom of the area steps, did not become more mellow as Susan herself ripened. But such general discoveries only heightened curiosity, by suggesting all that remained unknown. That much was left to find out was certain. In the first place, there was Mrs. Ford; what had Mr. Ford done with her? She was not

dead. Even Susan admitted that by implication, since, when questioned, she invariably answered in her sharpest tones and angriest key, "that Missus was very well, she was." And it was pretty well ascertained that, well or ill, the missing lady, whom not a soul had seen for the last seven years, was to be found behind those drawing-room blinds, which were never raised in day-time at least. But what did that prove? as the French say. Was she crazy, a prisoner, an invalid, or a hypochondriac? No one knew; and heaven alone knows what extraordinary conjectures were rife in Queen Square on this subject.

Such being the sort of interest Mr. Ford's house excited in the minds of his neighbours, the vigilance of their curiosity may be imagined. As a general rule, there was little or nothing to repay it; but a most interesting exception occurred on a gusty autumn afternoon. A double knock, a genuine double knock, was heard at Mr. Ford's door. Two cautious heads appeared; one at the parlour window of the house on the right-hand side, the other at the attic of that on the left. They were quickly withdrawn as Mr. Ford's visitor looked round and leered at Mrs. Buckley, then nodded waggishly at Mary Anne. He had leisure to do so, for the unusual event of a double knock not having been attended to, he had to repeat it with such an increase of force as secured attention. Susan, the sourest of sour-looking housemaids, came and opened, wiping her hands on a greasy apron as she did so, and looking askance at the visitor.

"Mr. Ford at home?" he said, jauntily swinging his cane.

"I shall see, sir," mistrustfully replied Susan; "what name, please, sir?"

"Captain George. Oh! he's at home for Captain George. Tell him his cousin, Captain George, wishes to speak to him five minutes—that's all."

Susan obeyed slowly, not without first giving Captain George a suspicious look.

He was a tall and handsome man of sixty, or thereabouts. He had brown eyes, dark hair, silvering fast, and mustachios carefully trimmed. He had, also, very good, straight features, and a pleasant smile, that revealed teeth of pearl; and, conscious of these personal advantages, Captain George displayed them to every female gaze with the most graceful liberality. He now smiled at Susan, spite her evident mistrust, and, following her in, kindly shut the street door, and at once made his way to the parlour; but Susan was first, and, laying her hand on the lock,

stared sternly at him. Captain George, by no means daunted, kissed his hand; and as Susan, amazed and indignant, was going to ask him what he meant by it, he added, with a wink, "Good—eh?" in a tone so evidently meant for a third person, that Susan at once looked round.

Peering through the banisters of the kitchen staircase, she saw the face of a boy, eating, with evident relish, into a good-sized tart. At once Susan left the parlour door, and, making a dart at the boy, she shook him soundly.

"So you have been and eaten your poor ma's tart. Eh! have you?—have you?"

Every question was accompanied by a shake. The culprit attempted resistance; a scuffle followed, and the noise attracted a lad of thirteen, fair, and very handsome, who at once put away Susan, and stepped between her and her victim.

"You must not, Sue," he said, sharply; "don't you be afraid, Neddy—I am here."

"Do you know what he has been and done, Master Robert?" asked Susan; "been and eaten missus's tart—and how am I to get her another?"

"He did wrong, but you must not touch him," doggedly said the elder boy; "I don't allow Neddy to be beaten at school, and no one shall lay a finger on him at home."

"She pulled my hair!" whimpered Neddy; "and if I ate the tart, William ate the pigeon."

"Well, then, if I don't settle master William for it!" cried Susan, exasperated, "that's all."

"I tell you—you shall not touch William either," said the elder brother; "no one shall beat my brothers whilst I am by. I shall punish them. Send William to me; and you, Neddy, just come this way."

He pushed the boy before him, through what seemed a garden door.

Susan stood looking sullenly at them; and Captain George, an amused and observant spectator of this scene, now that it was over, coolly opened the parlour door, and, putting in his head, without waiting to have his name taken in, said, in his pleasant way,

"It's only me. Never mind me. It's only Captain George."

The parlour which Captain George thus unceremoniously entered was a peculiar one; and not having seen it for something like seven or eight years, that gentleman allowed his keen

brown eyes to examine it curiously, whilst he exchanged a cordial greeting, coolly received, with Mr. Ford.

Captain George's first impression was, that he had never seen so comfortless, so untidy, so dirty a place; his second, that his cousin was even a poorer man than the outward appearance of his house, the behaviour of Susan, and the scene on the staircase, all strengthened by some private information, had led him to suppose. There was everything to justify both impressions. Tobacco smoke hung in clouds in the air; the paper hangings were dark with dirt and stains, where they were not torn away in strips, leaving the white walls bare. The table near the window was a litter of books, papers, dirty tumblers, cigar boxes, and bottles of various sizes. The old horse-hair sofa was broken in many places, and recklessly allowed its stuffing to escape. The chairs looked rickety and insecure. The carpet on the floor was full of holes and rents—a trap to unwary feet. The dusty mantel-shelf, above which hung a dull looking-glass with a long crack, was covered with dreary attempts at ornament. An old picture, a broken china vase, an empty watch-case, stood far apart on that long line of yellow board. The untidy hearth, still strewn with the ashes and cinders of a long-extinct fire, crowned this picture of domestic discomfort. Captain George saw it all, whilst he shook his cousin by the hand, paternally patting it with both his, proofs of affection which, as we have already said, Mr. Ford received coldly enough.

Mr. Ford was a man of forty-two, who had once been handsome, but who was now too worn and haggard to have any claim to the epithet. He was tall and sharp-featured, with good-natured though obstinate brown eyes, and a weak nether lip, that betrayed temper as well as weakness. His high, broad forehead had intellectual claims, but it was both feeble and haughty. His look, his smile, offered the same contradictions. There was shrewdness in the one, and kindness in the other; but Mr. Ford's look was not always intelligent, and his smile was often sarcastic, when it was not envious. He was, indeed, made up of the contrasts which are found in unsuccessful men, the result of broken aims and ever disappointed hopes, and unsuccessful was written in his whole aspect. His uncertain carriage and half-stoop, his loose gait in spite of great physical strength, his very hands thrust in his pockets, and his feet shuffling in a pair of old slippers, completed the story of the dismal ruin, one of the saddest eyes ever gazed on, that of a man.

Of these unpleasant facts, Captain George chose to remain

unconscious. He closed his mental vision, and saw a cheerful parlour, and a happy, prosperous man.

"Went to your chambers, and not finding you, came here," he said, gaily sitting down on a broken chair, and heroically disregarding its warning groan. "A comfortable place you have of it. Poor Mrs. Ford—poor Mrs. Ford—a great trouble." And Captain George meditatively smoothed his mustachios, and, in his compassion for Mr. Ford's troubles, abstractedly poured himself out a glass of rum.

"How is Mrs. George?" rather sulkily asked Mr. Ford, thrusting his hands deeper in his pockets, and leaning back in his chair.

"Not very well—not very well," replied Captain George, speaking softly, as if he were addressing the invalid lady herself; "Mrs. George is very delicate—very much so—like Mrs. Ford—all the ladies are, I am afraid."

"And so you went to my chambers," impatiently said Mr. Ford.

"Oh! to be sure! Fine little fellows those of yours! Gad, sir, I thought we should have had a battle on the kitchen stairs. William had eaten a pigeon, and Ned had tucked in a tart, and Susan was for immediate justice. But what's the big one's name? Robert, ay? Robert held out manfully for his little brothers—shan't touch them; I don't allow my little brothers to be beaten at school, and you shan't touch them; I'll punish them; and off he marches with them. Capital—on my word—capital—ha, ha! A regular trump, that boy of yours."

"And so you went to my chambers," said Mr. Ford again.

"That's to say, what brings you here, eh? That big boy is just like you. Just like you."

"So much the worse for himself," morosely replied Mr. Ford.

"Come, old fellow, don't be so sulky," said Captain George, giving him a jovial thrust with the end of his cane; "if I hunted you out to-day, it was to do you a good turn. Why, man, you know as well as any one that Captain George is a good-natured fellow, rather fiery now and then, but a good-natured fellow."

A most knowing wink of the left eye, a wink that recalled to Mr. Ford's memory many a merry night, when Captain George had at least put on wonderfully well the appearance, if he did not possess the reality, of good-nature, compelled a smile, an advantage which Captain George at once followed up.

"I have come to make your fortune," he said, striking his stick on the floor, and giving every word suitable emphasis.

"Have you made yours?" asked Mr. Ford.

"I have come to make your fortune," repeated Captain George, disdaining to answer the question. "A hundred pounds, no more, sir, will make your fortune this very day."

Mr. Ford was just then very much in want of a guinea, and to be asked for a hundred pounds by the least trustworthy of his acquaintance was not soothing, even though the end in view was so excellent as the making of his fortune. He could not even consider the proposal under its ludicrous aspect. He felt sharp, irritable, and full of his wrongs, and humour and Captain George were equally foreign to his mood. An exclamation which did not convey a benediction rose to his lips, but hospitality checked it, and it subsided into a sort of impatient and half-muttered growl.

"Not a hundred!—well, then, five hundred, say five hundred," facetiously added Captain George.

"You had better not," exclaimed Mr. Ford, looking much excited—"you had better not, Captain George."

"Why, you are just like that boy of yours now," said Captain George—"shan't touch them, no one shall touch my brothers. You are just like him now—a regular trump that boy is!"

"I tell you you had better not," resumed Mr. Ford, with rising anger. "I am not to be fooled out of any more money. And if I had what I lent you, and what I ——"

"Now, what's the use of ripping up old sores?" expostulated Captain George; "let bygones be bygones. If you had not been good-natured to me formerly, you know well enough I should not now have this opportunity of doing you a good turn. And, seriously, what is a hundred pounds? Now, what is it?"

Mr. Ford's glass was by him; he took and drained it sullenly.

"A wilful man—a wilful man," said Captain George. "Now, just listen to me; hear me, only hear me, my dear fellow, and I will convince you that the money must be found. Now, just listen; but are you sure we are alone?"

"Ay, alone enough."

"No fear of that pleasant-looking maid of yours"—here Captain George winked in the direction of the kitchen stairs—"having her ear at the keyhole?"

Mr. Ford impatiently grumbled that there was no fear; upon which Captain George rose, and, cautiously putting his hand to his mouth, whispered something in Mr. Ford's ear.

"Mines," audibly said Mr. Ford.

"Hush—sh! my dear fellow," and Captain George whispered again.

"There was to be a canal once," surlily said Mr. Ford.

"The fortune of war," replied Captain George, with great coolness, "the fortune of war. A hundred pounds will do it this time—not guineas, mind; a hundred pounds!"

Mr. Ford rested his elbow on the table and leaned his cheek on his hand. He had not a hundred pounds indeed, but he had been staggered by Captain George's whispers, and Captain George, who knew his face of old, was quite aware of the fact.

"It is to your strong practical sense I appeal, my dear fellow," he said, insidiously, praising Mr. Ford for the quality he least possessed. "If any one understands these matters you do; and whether you invest or not, I shall be glad of your opinion on my own account."

"Oh! that is it, is it?" sneered Mr. Ford, "I thought you had some object in coming here to-day."

Captain George looked at Mr. Ford with profound admiration, winked, gave him a thrust of his cane, and drawing a packet of papers from the breast-pocket of his coat, he put them on the table with an emphatic thump of his left hand, and a significant "there!"

Mr. Ford took the papers up and glanced hastily over them. Then he began at the beginning, and whilst Captain George leaned back in his chair and surveyed the walls and the ceiling, he read them through with close attention. Mr. Ford was, unfortunately for himself, an excellent judge of business matters, and he soon perceived that the speculation had every appearance of being sound and fortunate. Judgment is of two kinds—critical and practical. Mr. Ford's was critical; no one knew better than he did the weak or the strong point of this world's concerns. In these matters he was keen, clear-sighted and sensible, but even as good critics rarely write good books, so Mr. Ford, who saw so clearly and so well where the elements of success lay, never yet had known how to secure its fruits. The undertakings in which he had embarked were all fair and prosperous, but either he withdrew too soon from them through caprice, or he stayed too long through obstinacy. That practical sense which enables men, ignorant, untaught, and often inexperienced, to do the right thing at the right moment, was that which failed him. He said he was unlucky, and many people said so too; and so

he was, but his was the ill-luck not of circumstance, but of character, the most fatal of any.

With secret irritation and discontent, he now read those sheets of foolscap, pregnant with golden promises, none of which could be fulfilled for him. "Even if I had the money, something would come to cross it all," was his bitter thought; "and I have not got it; and that fool, who cannot know this thing will answer—or he would not have come to me—will reap all the benefit."

"Well," anxiously said Captain George, who had been sucking the head of his cane for the last five minutes.

"Well," said Mr. Ford, pushing away the papers with an impatient sigh, "it looks well, but I will have nothing to do with it."

Captain George's face fell.

"Then you don't think well of it," he said, taking up the papers.

"Oh! yes, I do; but just leave me these for a day or so—I had better look at them again."

Captain George obeyed with great alacrity; then, suddenly looking uneasy,

"I say, Ford, fair play; don't invest, and not tell me: fair play—eh?"

"If you talk of fair play, I shall begin and suspect something," said Mr. Ford, sharply; "I have already told you I shall not invest."

Captain George poured himself out a glass of rum, shook his head, rose, and walked out. Mr. Ford saw him to the door. On the last step, Captain George turned round, and nodding with what looked very like drunken solemnity, he said, with much emphasis:

"Deep, Ford, deep—devilishly deep," and walked away.

CHAPTER II.

MR. FORD closed the door on his visitor; then going to the head of the kitchen stairs, he asked, in a subdued tone,

"Susan, are the boys ready to go and see their mother?"

"The boys ha' been and adone all sorts of mischief, sir," shortly answered Susan, appearing on the stairs, and speaking in the same key; "whilst I opened the door to the strange gentleman, one ate the tart, and the other the pigeon, that was for

missus's dinner. They're worse than cats, them boys—they are!"

Mr. Ford had a pimple on his forehead, which he always scratched in cases of difficulty. He now recurred to it with a look more perplexed than indignant.

"I am afraid the poor fellows are often hungry," sighed Mr. Ford: "you must get something else, Susan."

"I told missus the cat had done it. God forgive me all the stories I do tell in this house. And she said 'never mind.'"

"Well, that is all right; is it not?"

"Why, no, sir, it ain't. The cat made me bring in Mary Ann, and what do you think missus is up to now? Why, she wants Mary Ann up stairs."

Now Mary Ann was a fiction, the myth of the household, and this was a most inconvenient wish, as Mr. Ford's lengthened face expressed.

"I put it off, saying Mary Ann was ill in bed," pursued Susan; "but that is not all, missus wishes for fruit. Now, sir, Covent-garden is not far off: but I put it to you, sir, can I get cherries at this time of the year?"

"Perhaps hot-house grapes would do," suggested Mr. Ford, looking deeply perplexed.

"Perhaps they will," doubtfully said Susan; "and perhaps they will not; but that ain't all. Missus wants an organ."

"A harmonium, you mean; well—perhaps I can get one on hire."

But when Mr. Ford looked round his wretched home, when he remembered his debts and his downhill name, he wondered who would be so fool-hardy as to trust him with an instrument.

"Perhaps an accordion would do," said Susan, looking sagacious; "organs are only fit for churches."

But Mr. Ford shook his head. His wife had been an accomplished musician, and none but a first-rate instrument would answer her.

"God help me!" he exclaimed, distractedly; "it will be all out if she does not get that harmonium, and it will break her heart, Susan, it will break her heart, not for herself, but for the boys and me."

Tears stood in his eyes, and Susan looked sorely troubled, but the accordion had exhausted her short stores of comfort.

"Well," said Mr. Ford, with a deep sigh, "I must put her

off for a while ; and say I am promised one. Tell the boys to dress, and come to me, Susan, and then I'll see."

Alas ! "I'll see," was an old phrase, and Susan knew it but too well. "I'll see" had often paid Susan's wages, and been the final settlement of many a bill ; but "I'll see" had never wrought any substantial good. "And if she counts on 'I'll see,' for her organ," thought Susan, as she went up-stairs, "she'll wait long enough."

Poor Mr. Ford remained absorbed in perplexing meditations. From whom could he borrow ?—what could he sell to get that harmonium for his wife ?

"Decidedly she is getting better," he thought ; "for once she could bear no noise, and now she wants to make a noise that will fill the house. She is getting better, that is one comfort."

"The boys are ready, sir," whispered Susan, on the staircase.

"Have they got on their shoes, Susan ?"

"They have, sir."

"Mind you stay outside, and make them take their things off at once, Susan."

"No fear of it, sir."

"And, Susan, tell Robert to give them a talking about the tart and the pigeon. They mind him more than they do me."

Susan nodded grimly, and Mr. Ford softly went up the staircase. The three boys were standing on the landing. Their faces were washed ; their hair was brushed ; their attire was neat and clean. Their father gave them a scrutinizing glance, then opening the drawing-room door, he signed them to enter. They obeyed, in silence. He followed them on tiptoe, and closed the door with so much care, that it made not the least noise.

The drawing-room of Mr. Ford's house offered a very striking contrast to the squalid parlour below. Here time had stood still ; the seven years during which the lower regions had lost the rule of the mistress of the house and gone to chaos, had left no trace of their passage up-stairs. Mrs. Ford's drawing-room looked as quiet, as decorous as when it had been closed on visitors and guests seven years before. Like its tenant, it was melancholy and faded, a token of better times, when life was young and hope had her day ; but the furniture, if not as fresh, was as good as new ; a carpet that would still wear many years—for who ever trod on it—spread its faded roses on the floor.

The dark velvet curtains seemed to have been just hung by the upholsterer, in their heavy, precise folds on either side of the yellow blinds that were kept rigidly closed; for the invalid could not bear even the mild light of Queen Square. Everything had the same fixed and subdued aspect. The tables were set exactly in their places; the chairs seemed to belong to the walls, where they had grown old-fashioned, unused. The pictures, mere family portraits, were shrouded in thick coverings, from the weary gaze of the sick lady; the very looking-glass over the cold and dreary fireplace was veiled with a half-transparent tissue, through which it reflected, in dim outlines, the gloomy furniture, but gave back no distinct image to the look of Mrs. Ford. Books, woman's work, graceful trifles were absent from this melancholy apartment, where all spoke of a painful stillness—of a life suddenly and prematurely checked in its flow, and nothing more so than the calm motionless figure of Mrs. Ford herself, as she sat in her chair—with closed eyes and clasped hands, her head bent, her figure wrapped in a long, loose dark robe, like a monastic garment.

Mrs. Ford was one of those fair women with chiselled features full of repose, who even in the inevitable decay of health and youth, suggest great past beauty. Nature had given her the smooth Grecian forehead, the straight nose, and exquisite lips of the Venus of Milo. She had also bestowed on her the noble neck, the stately figure of that immortal image of woman's majestic loveliness; and though time and disease had done their work, though pain had contracted the brow, though the large blue eyes had grown cold and vacant, though the lips were pale and the cheeks colourless, and the wasted figure had learned to stoop, that subtle part of beauty which survives the bloom and the full outlines of youth still lingered over all.

For the last seven years, ever since the birth of her youngest child, Mrs. Ford had not left the first floor, where we now find her. Visitors—few though they were—were never admitted to her presence. She had no near relatives in England; and her complaint, a nervous one, required absolute rest. Her children saw her rarely, and then in silence. Susan and Mr. Ford alone spoke to her.

Mr. Ford considered his wife's long and mysterious illness one of the many sorrows of his lot, and not without cause. She had been, though he knew it not, the good genius of his life; and it was since her withdrawal from its concerns that it had sunk into the slough of Despond. Since then the furniture had

got broken, and Mr. Ford's coat greasy and shabby ; since then he had deserted his chambers, and muddled over grog at home ; since then the children had grown up lawless, and bills had accumulated ; and nothing had gone well from the day when the firm though gentle mind which had ruled the household and influenced its master, had been conquered by insidious disease.

"My dear !" whispered Mr. Ford ; "the children !"

Mrs. Ford looked up. A faded smile passed across her lips. She gazed at the three boys ; she embraced the youngest first, then William, then Robert. Then she looked at them again.

"Do they study well ?" she asked of her husband.

"Admirably ; indeed," coolly continued Mr. Ford, who had kept his children at home for a week through his own inability to pay for their schooling, and the schoolmaster's decided reluctance to trust him any longer—"indeed I am looking out for a tutor for them, and I think——." What other invention Mr. Ford was going to indulge in, we cannot say ; but it suddenly occurred to him that this school of deceit might not be the best for his children to listen to, and he abruptly added, "Have they not been long enough here, my dear ?"

Mrs. Ford nodded assent, and the three boys left the room, to Mr. Ford's infinite relief. He was always on thorns lest they should "let out something," to use his own words. He closed the door upon them, and came back to his wife ; he sat down by her side. She shut her eyes. She could look at her children, but the sight of any other face was distasteful to her, especially so was that of her husband.

Theirs had been a love-match. At twenty-three Alicia Norton was what men call "a splendid creature," and women correctively "a very fine girl." She had ten thousand pounds, and suitors for her hand abounded. Some were titled, many prosperous—John Ford, a poor struggling lawyer, was preferred. He was then a handsome man of twenty-seven, but his weak nether lip, his vacillating look, and the irritable cast of his features, would have warned away a wiser woman. Alicia saw the kindness of his glance and smile and took it for goodness. She heard the confident assertions, the resentful protests of a vain man, and she took them for the aspirations and susceptibility of a man of ambition and strong character. Mr. Ford was neither ; he had talent, honesty, and buoyant hopes, but little more. One of his first acts was to invest his wife's ten thousand pounds in a speculation that promised well, but from which wise men soon withdrew. Mr. Ford disregarded, or received with complacent

smiles, his wife's hesitating objections. Before six months were over the ten thousand pounds had enriched a few knaves, and were lost forever to Alicia and her children yet unborn. Spite this mistake, which he would not acknowledge, Mr. Ford did not forfeit at once his wife's confidence. She still hoped in him, and believed in the future; but a few years after this loss, five thousand pounds which Mr. Ford inherited from an uncle, shared the same fate; Mrs. Ford had little or no imagination—love could give her illusions, but once the hard touch of reality had dispelled them, there was in her no power to call them back. She now saw her husband as he was—good natured, obstinate, foolish and intellectual, and her pride in him was gone for ever.

Mrs. Ford was a very proud woman. She would not acknowledge that she had been mistaken; no, it was Mr. Ford who had deceived her. She did not reproach him; but she brooded over her wrongs with the obstinacy of a narrow mind, and the bitterness of a wounded heart.

Of this Mr. Ford remained unconscious. He adored his wife, and was convinced that she adored him. At the same time, he thought himself superior to her, and showed her that he thought so. He concealed none of his weaknesses from her. Nay, he was rather lavish in displaying them to her gaze. She saw that though his kind heart could win him friends, his irritable temper would allow him to keep none. Mr. Ford cast away from him every helping hand, and whilst many derived benefit from him, he derived benefit from none. This result, which he was clear-sighted enough to see, but not frank enough to acknowledge, made him sore. He took scornful views of human nature, and grew sour at home. Yet he still fondly loved his wife. His love increased instead of lessening with years, whilst hers daily grew weaker and weaker, and at length died entirely. Something remained: duty, lukewarm liking—but not love.

Alicia Norton could not do without admiring her husband, and it was impossible to live with Mr. Ford and to admire him, spite some sterling qualities. His want of judgment had given her pride a great shock, his folly in alienating men whom a shrewder man could have made subservient to his own ends, irritated and vexed her: his rejection of her advice, his carelessness of her opinion offended her, and the strange blindness with which he still believed in her love, and even boasted of it in her presence, made her despise him. His want of success in his profession, which he neglected for ruinous speculations, the poverty

to which it condemned her and her children, made her severe to his weaknesses—and these, alas! were not of the heroic kind.

Mr. Ford was an untidy man at home. He was selfish in little things, pettish, irritable, and despotic by fits. His kind heart, his sincere love, could not soften a woman like Alicia. She had convinced herself that he was to blame for having married her, not she for having married him; and she settled down into a puerile mode of discontent, which she had, however, sufficient strength and dignity not to betray. She allowed her husband to adore her, and even to enjoy the shew of affection which could deceive him. She no longer obtruded the advice he would not always follow, but confined her attention to domestic concerns. Sometimes she hated herself for having ever loved him, and sometimes she hated life for having so ruthlessly lost its prizes: Love, wealth, ambition and its rewards.

"Some lives are one great wreck," thought Alicia, in her despair, "and such is mine."

Her greatest trial was yet to come. Robert grew up like her in person, and like her husband in temper and manner. Mr. Ford spoke in a drawl, interrupted by loud pettish jerks, and Robert showed signs of imitating the paternal propensity. Eagerly Mrs. Ford tried to correct the boy and to make him speak in a clear and distinct tone. Robert's vanity was stirred, and he showed himself remarkably ductile, until that same vanity was more powerfully appealed to by his father's unmerciful ridicule. Inspired by an unlucky spirit of opposition, which always seized him at the wrong moment, he did his best to undo his wife's teaching.

"Why, Robert," he said to him with his derisive laugh, "what priggish pedantry have they put into you?"

Robert, who was not then much more than six years old, had not the moral fortitude to withstand this taunt. His mother saw him redden.

"Talk like a man," pursued his father, "and not like a methodist preacher. Why, all the other boys will laugh at you when you go to school."

"They shan't," sullenly answered Robert.

This scene, one of many, was the last Mrs. Ford witnessed. She listened to her husband, and never spoke or remonstrated with him. She was not even angry with Mr. Ford. No, the sting went deeper. In Robert's sudden and resentful abandonment of her teaching, she recognized the weak vanity of his father. Was he then to grow up like him? She was near her

third confinement, and as she thought of another child her heart seemed to break within her. Was she, Alicia Norton, to be the mother of a race of fools and of social outcasts?

She went upstairs that night in an agony of tumultuous feelings and of wounded pride. The child, a third boy, was born before the morning. Its sex gave her the last pang she could suffer as a mother. Another image of her husband! She never recovered the shock—disease seized her, and made her helpless in her own home. Perhaps the divine chastisement of too much pride.

This was a twofold calamity. Whilst illness held her captive upstairs, the house below was going to the ruin of abandonment, dirt, and squalor; her husband drank and neglected the little business he had, and her children grew up wild, rude, and undisciplined. But the greatest misfortune of all was the complete darkness which settled over Mrs. Ford's mental vision. She became querulous, capricious, and exacting. She brooded over her wrongs until she could think of and see nothing else. She was an ill-used woman, and Mr. Ford was the worst husband a woman had ever had. She was too amiable and too proud to reproach him; she even called in resignation to her aid, and was heroic enough to allow him to see and address her: but his daily presence was an infliction it required all that heroism to bear.

All this would have been ridiculous if it had not been tragic in some of its consequences. It was during this long illness, which would have alienated the love of many a better man, that Mr. Ford's tenderness for his wife burned with purest flame. He proved it in a hundred ways, which, could she but have known the least of them, would have subdued and humbled even Alicia's proud heart.

When the first inroads of pinching poverty began, Mr. Ford resolved that, no matter *who* suffered from this change, Alicia should not. She was not in a state of mind to bear care or to hear of debts, why trouble her with such concerns? Then she could not be denied her fancies, no matter what they might be! No, Alicia must be gratified—he, the boys even, could do without. Thus the miserable condition of the little world below had a double meaning: it was the work of unthriftiness, of loose habits and extravagance, and it was also the work of much love. Mrs. Ford's fancies were not very expensive, but they were numerous and wasteful. Often when a savoury and separate meal was brought up to her, she would send it down untasted and ask for a cup of tea. Then she required attendance so

exclusive, that for a long time an extra servant was kept; when that became impossible, the work below was neglected and the parlour took care of itself, and the boys tore and mended their clothes if they pleased. The havoc and ruin she caused, Mrs. Ford was never allowed to suspect. The boys had clothes in which they appeared before their mother, and Susan spoke of Margaret and Mary Ann to her deceived mistress. With time she dropped Margaret, finding the fiction troublesome, but Mary Ann she clung to as a convenient scapegoat.

And still Mrs. Ford thought herself ill-used. That there should be comfort she took as a matter of course. That there should be neither wealth nor luxury was Mr. Ford's fault. Another man with his opportunities would have kept his carriage long before this. She did not care about the carriage, nor want it, but it was one of those proofs of success which Mrs. Ford was too matter of fact to overlook. These feelings were always strongest when Mr. Ford paid her his daily visit; she could not and would not show them, and the restraint made his presence doubly distasteful. Poor Mr. Ford ascribed her cold manner to her complaint. And she was so cold, and therefore, as he thought, so ill, on this present day, that it pained him. He thrust his hands in his pockets and looked gloomy. It was hard to have so sickly a wife. Other women were not so—seven years too; but then poor Alicia could not help it—no—and she was so fond of him, too, with it all.

"How is it you are at home at this hour?" at length asked Mrs. Ford.

"I had an appointment," replied her husband, not choosing to confess he had not gone out that day.

"With whom?" inquired Mrs. Ford, who seemed in the questioning mood—one rare with her.

"With—with Captain George," was the hesitating reply.

Mrs. Ford opened her eyes, and seemed to search far back into memory for the name. She found it, for her cheek flushed, her look lit, but she did not speak.

"He is the same jaunty fellow as ever," pursued Mr. Ford, "but the very man to dazzle fools."

"He is no fool," said Mrs. Ford.

"I did not say he was, my dear; but he is shallow, which is worse. I have studied that man's character thoroughly, and he is shallow—to the heart's core."

"Take care, Mr. Ford—take care—" said his wife, sitting up in her chair, and leaning her two hands on its leather arms, "that man is not shallow—he is bad—"

"Do not excite yourself, my dear," kindly said her husband :
"leave Captain George to me. You know it is not easy to
deceive me, my love."

"He is dangerous," she gasped—"dangerous!"

"Yes, my love—to some—but not to me. You know my
insight into character."

"What did he come for?—what is it?" she persisted.

"My love, you know I do not talk to you on professional
matters; but rely upon it, I have not the least faith in Captain
George; I know the man," added Mr. Ford, with great em-
phasis.

Mrs. Ford smiled bitterly. That was how she was treated
—that was how her advice was received.

"I am afraid Captain George's loud knock disturbed you,"
said Mr. Ford; "but it was Susan who opened——"

"And why did Susan open?" interrupted Mrs. Ford :
"Susan is to wait upon me. I must insist on Mary Ann attend-
ing to the door."

Mr. Ford scratched his pimple, but hit on a bright inven-
tion.

"Mary Ann was in the dumps," he said, gravely; "I gave
her warning this morning—that girl is getting unmanageable."

And so she was; and Mr. Ford, whom the practice of seven
years had not yet made perfect in the art of invention, had
resolved to get rid of this troublesome person altogether.

Mrs. Ford shut her eyes again, and sighed; another man
would have had a footman by this; but no—thanks to his folly
and imprudence, Mr. Ford would live and die with two female
servants.

"Mr. Ford," she said, gravely, "do as you please about
Mary Ann; keep or dismiss her—what is it to me? but do not
take Susan from me. She has enough to do in attending to
me."

"Certainly, my love, by all means."

"As to that Mary Ann, I am glad she is going. I am tired
of hearing about her misdeeds."

"And she shall go," emphatically replied Mr. Ford.

"Take a first-rate servant instead," pursued his wife; "give
her twenty, thirty pounds a year if need be—a little money
more or less is not much matter."

"Of course not."

"And, Mr. Ford, get me an harmonium, if you please. I
cannot talk, and yet the silence of these rooms is too much for
me."

"Certainly, my love. I really do believe you are getting better," cried Mr. Ford, ardently.

Tears of pure delight stood in his eyes at the thought; but he unfortunately smacked his lips in a foolish, exulting, and decidedly vulgar fashion, which was habitual to him.

"And I once loved that man," thought Alicia, turning her head away.

"I daresay you have had enough of me, my dear," submissively said Mr. Ford: "well, I shall leave you," he added, rising, "and I shall see about your harmonium."

She thanked him coldly. Mr. Ford left the room on tiptoe. He did not know, indeed, how to procure the harmonium, but he was confident that his wife was getting better, and his heart felt light and buoyant with the unexpected happiness.

CHAPTER III.

"I must get my dear Alicia that instrument," thought Mr. Ford, as he entered the front parlour, "only it is the money!" He sighed, for money was the name of all his cares, and he sank wearily in his chair. As he did so, he was struck at once with the sight of some dark object in the square, which intercepted itself between the light and its medium, the window. He looked, and saw a cab standing at the door, with a trunk on the roof. Convinced there was some mistake, he leaned back lazily, and was extending his hand towards his usual companion and friend, the bottle, when a thundering knock shook the house, and, after a brief delay, the parlour door opened abruptly, and Susan broke in on her master. Susan, never very pleasant of aspect, now looked lowering and sullen. Her eyes sparkled with angry fire, and there was an angry spot, not on her brow, where sat a frown, but on either of her sallow cheeks.

"Miss Lavinia Ford," she said, sharply; "an' I had known the lady was coming, it might have been better—but I am of no consequence."

"Miss Lavinia Ford," mechanically repeated Mr. Ford, unable to realize the fulness of the new calamity that was coming to him under the shape of his only remaining sister, the last of three; and before he had recollected himself sufficiently to rise and go and meet her, Miss Ford herself, half smiling, half crying, entered the room, holding a handbox in her left hand. With a flurried look, and an hysterical "How are you, John?" she

clasped his neck with her right arm, and cried bitterly on his shoulder.

Then, indeed, Mr. Ford understood it all. His sister was in deep mourning; her godmother was dead, and she had come to his penniless home, a new burden, another care.

A poor man cannot help such thoughts; they are the inevitable curse of his poverty; yet, with all that, Mr. Ford's welcome was cordial, though it could not be cheerful.

"Cheer up, Livy," he said, with a sigh; "there is not much here, but you did well to come. Sit down. Susan, get Miss Ford some tea."

Now was the time for Susan's revenge.

"Please, sir, will you give me the money for some fresh butter?" she said, civilly.

Mr. Ford reddened.

"I have no change," he answered, sharply; "get Miss Ford her tea first."

"I have change," hastily said Miss Lavinia. "Here is my purse; and will you, John, pay the cabman, if you please? I bargained with him for half-a-crown from the station."

"That is a shilling too much; he must not have more than eighteenpence."

Miss Ford looked disconcerted.

"Please, give him the half-crown," she said, plaintively; "it was a bargain, you know."

"Oh, if you like to throw away a shilling, please yourself," said her brother, internally resolving not to be bound to so foolish a bargain. "Well, Livy, so the poor old lady is dead. Don't cry, child, there's a home for you, though a poor one. Susan, show Miss Ford upstairs."

Miss Ford, whom her brother called child, was a maiden lady of forty, at the very least. Her pale blue eyes had an uncertain look; her speech was hesitating and slow; yet her features expressed a sort of firmness, the result of an inert will, and of a watchful conscientiousness. She was of those who pass through life, seeming to yield to all its accidents, yet whose passive obstinacy prevails in the end over many a peril in which the daring and the strong are wrecked. Miss Ford's green band-box was an instance in point. How it had travelled in the railway carriage, and not in the luggage van, in spite of the guard—Miss Ford had convinced herself there was no moral wrong in violating his peremptory commands—how it had withstood the angry denunciations of other travellers, and hidden under

seats at the right time, and emerged again when it was safe to do so, and gently migrated from Miss Lavinia's lap to a convenient place by her side, where it had finally rested—and how Miss Ford's quiet will had guarded it and prevailed throughout, would form a perfect odyssey in the history of handboxes. This quiet, hesitating, conscientious, and obstinate lady was now surrendered to Susan; and so well aware was Susan that a contest for supremacy was inevitable between her and her master's sister, that, like a good general, she began the battle at once, and chose the first-floor landing for the encounter.

"You must not go in there, marm, if you please," she said, stepping between the drawing-room door and Miss Ford, who was innocently going to open it; "that is Missus's room, marm, and no one ever goes in there but myself and master."

"Is she so very ill?" asked Miss Lavinia.

Susan deigned no reply, but said, shortly, "Go on, please; I suppose I must put you in the nursery."

Miss Lavinia, who knew that she had nephews and no niece, felt rather alarmed at the prospect of sharing the apartment of three boys; but held her peace, as was her wont, cogitating inwardly on escape.

"In here, please," said Susan, opening the nursery door, and ushering Miss Ford into as dreary an apartment as ever was devoted to boyhood.

And very eloquently did boyhood assert itself in every nook of the vacant room. Tops, marbles, kites, sticks lay strewn about, sharing the floor with the dust. Carpet there was none, and but little furniture. Three narrow beds, a dilapidated chest of drawers, a broken wash-hand stand, and walls covered with scrawls of writing and attempts at caricature, did not impress Miss Ford with the prospect of an agreeable home. She looked around her dismally enough, and remembered, with a sigh, her pleasant room at her godmother's, with its white dimity curtains, and garden prospect of lawn and flower-beds. Susan watched her countenance with an angry eye, and, conscious of certain domestic sins in the shape of dust and dirt, she resentfully interpreted Miss Ford's dismayed look to her own account.

Susan had many virtues. She was a faithful servant, heroically devoted to the needy family with whom her lot had been cast; she was tenderly attached to her suffering mistress, for there was between them a secret tie which Susan alone knew—a debt which she gratefully remembered and repaid daily; but human nature is weak, and Susan's share of it was very frail in the

matter of temper. Hers was of the aggressive and aggravating kind, to use that expressive and popular word in its vulgar sense. Amongst other manifestations of this unamiable quality was one which most people who had to do with Susan found particularly irritating. To attack was only the common and positive degree of Susan's displeasure ; but to ignore plain facts, to become suddenly blind, ignorant, and foolish, was, to those who knew her, a sure token of her superlative anger. Anxious to let Miss Ford into this little secret of her character, she now said, shortly—she never spoke otherwise—but with every appearance of candour :

"Of course, you've brought your bed, marm?"

"My bed!" exclaimed Miss Ford, taken by surprise. "Oh dear, no!"

"Then perhaps you'll send for it," suggested Susan, calmly.

"I have got none," said Miss Ford, beginning to look alarmed.

"Then where do you mean to sleep, marm? We've got no spare beds here."

Miss Ford not answering, Susan pursued in a philosophic tone:

"I always thought that people travelled with their beds; and I am sure it is the best plan, unless when they mean to sleep at hotels. There is an hotel close by; perhaps you would like to go there, marm, until your bed comes. I dare say it will soon be here—things come so fast by rail now-a-days."

Miss Ford looked at Susan, who preserved a stoic countenance—then at the miserable room, which read to her a whole homily of poverty and neglect—and, overcome by fatigue and grief at so great a change from decent comfort to squalid misery, she sat down on the nearest chair and fairly burst into tears. This confession of helplessness conquered Susan.

"Don't take on, marm," she said, kindly enough. "I shall bring you a cup of tea presently, and never mind about the bed. You can have mine, and I can manage somehow in the kitchen. Just give me that bandbox; that's what's pulling you down."

But, to Susan's indignation, Miss Ford, who had kept a tight hold of her bandbox whilst she was embracing her brother in the parlour, now, spite her sobs and her tears, grasped it firmly with both hands.

"Please yourself, marm," said Susan, "but there are no thieves here;" and leaving Miss Lavinia to shift as she pleased, Susan left the room. The door had scarcely closed upon her when it opened again, and Susan's head was thrust in.

"Please, marm, to tell the porter when he brings your bed to-night not to make any noise, as Missus is very ill and can't abide it."

Miss Ford was essentially a meek, patient woman, but this persistent insolence was too much for her. She started to her feet with sudden wrath, and, confronting Susan, said in a quivering voice:

"If you say anything more about that bed, I shall slap your face, you hussy!"

Then sinking down once more on the chair, she again burst into tears.

"Oh! very well, marm—thank you, marm!" replied Susan, with a short laugh; "but I don't think you will do it, marm."

And, closing the door gently, spite her secret indignation, she walked downstairs and entered the parlour, where Mr. Ford was just resting after a short but fierce encounter with the cabman, who had gone away angrily, denouncing the bad faith of the lady—no lady, he was sure—who had deluded him with the promise of half-a-crown.

"If you please, sir, I give you notice that I must leave in a week," said Susan, without preamble. "I ain't a-going to stay and have my face slapped for any one; that I ain't."

Now, apart from her fidelity, Susan had just then very high value in her master's eyes. She represented no less a sum than nine pounds five shillings and sixpence, the amount of wages due to her.

"Well, what's up now?" growled Mr. Ford.

"Oh, nothing, sir, only my new missus has promised to slap my face for me, the next time I open my lips; and as of course I can't do my business without talking, I ain't a-going to stay—that's all, sir."

Mr. Ford looked profoundly perplexed, then annoyed, then angry, and having relieved his feelings with a petulant and irrelevant exclamation of—

"The devil take the women—that's all; there's not been a pair in the house more than five minutes, and they are already fighting," he stooped to expostulation with the member of the offending sex who stood before him.

"Nonsense, Susan, we can't part with you—you know," he said impatiently. "Your mistress could not do without you—no one else knows how to wait on her, and you have been like a mother to the boys."

"Susan knew she had, but for all that she must go—she had

done her duty, but new faces and new ways and Susan could not get on together; and Mr. Ford had her notice—in a week she must leave.”

“You will do no such thing,” good-humouredly said her master, who detected lurkings of ftness in her tone. “And, at all events, I am sure you will show Miss Ford that no one can beat you in serving up a good cup of tea.”

“Susan knew nothing about that. Of course it was her duty to do her best, and she would do her best for Miss Ford or any one.” And without requesting supplies for fresh butter—a sign of relenting, which her master noticed, Susan left the room and went down to the kitchen.

Some men have a great terror of domestic storms. Mr. Ford fled like a coward before them. Convinced that he should have to face at least Miss Lavinia’s tears, and feeling unequal to the infliction, he hastened out of the house, first summoning to his presence Robert, who was in the garden with his brothers, and instructing him to receive his aunt with due honour and affection.

Robert looked disconcerted. They were miserably poor; what did their aunt, who was poor too, come to them for?

“And mind that Bill and Ned are not rude to her,” continued Mr. Ford. “And tell her I am obliged to go out—and so I must: your dear mother wants a harmonium, and I must get her one somehow or other. I wonder,” he added, with a sigh, “if that old screw, James George, would let me have the money.”

Mr. James George was Captain George’s brother—both were related to Mr. Ford; but Captain George was needy and thriftless, and Mr. James George was wealthy and stingy. It did not seem likely that a man of that temper would assist Mr. Ford, yet on that forlorn hope he now went forth. He had scarcely left when his sister came down, her eyes still red with weeping.

“Are you my nephew Robert?” she timidly asked of the lad who stood looking at her shyly.

With tolerable good grace Robert confessed the relationship, and shook hands with his aunt.

“Is this the room in which you take your meals?” she asked, in the same timid, hesitating way.

With a blush of shame Robert answered that it was. He was keenly alive to the proprieties and decencies of life, and he knew well enough what sort of a room this must seem to his Aunt Lavinia. She gave it a very melancholy look; but bad

though it was, it could be mended ; untidiness was her particular aversion, and she could not help saying,

" My dear, do you suppose if I were to clear that table just a little—do you think, I mean, it would annoy your father ? "

Robert stared at the idea that anything should annoy Mr. Ford, the most pacific of men in such matters, and gave Miss Lavinia full authority to act as she pleased. She began by clearing away the empty bottles, then she gathered the books in a heap, then, as carefully as if they were of paramount importance, she put the old envelopes, letters, and bills together. Robert watched her with considerable interest. He began to understand that though poor his aunt was a very valuable person ; visions of decently mended clothes and buttons sewed on flitted before his eyes, and, after mature deliberation—Robert was never in a hurry—he kindly offered to assist Miss Ford.

" And Bill and Ned shall help you too," he added ; " tell me what you want to be done, aunt, and I'll make them do it. "

Miss Lavinia accepted the magnanimous offer. Bill and Ned were summoned, introduced to their aunt, and set to work forthwith. The empty bottles were taken down to the kitchen ; the books were put on their neglected shelves ; the papers were tied in a neat parcel with red tape, and made to look quite respectable ; Master William Ford was despatched for a packing needle and thread with which Miss Lavinia did her best to sew up the rents in the carpet. In short, before an hour had elapsed the room, thanks to the exertions of Miss Lavinia and of her three nephews, who entered heart and soul into the cause, wore quite another look, so that when Susan came up with the tea-tray she had what she scarcely expected to find, an empty table to put it on, whilst Miss Lavinia had the satisfaction of taking her tea in an improved apartment. So remarkable indeed was that improvement that Mr. Ford was struck with it when he came home. Rather a pleasant family picture was that which greeted his eyes. William and Edward were sitting at the table studying their lessons for Robert, for, since they went no longer to school, their elder brother had become their teacher. Robert himself had put by his book in order to hold the skein of silk his aunt was unwinding, and Robert's jacket lying on the table near Miss Lavinia plainly said what the silk was for.

" Why, Livy, you have done wonders with the parlour," said Mr. Ford, missing the usual disorder.

" The room looks beautifully," observed Robert with great complacency.

"I took down the bottles," cried Edward.

"You only took down three," cried William.

"Robert, it was I took them down, was it not?"

"Hush, boys," replied Robert with great dignity, and not condescending to settle the point at issue.

"I hope I shall be able to mend the sofa to-morrow," timidly remarked Miss Lavinia; "I had not time to-day."

"You'll find plenty to do, my dear," sighed Mr. Ford, the momentary satisfaction of Miss Lavinia's improvement being all gone.

He had called on Mr. James George, after ascertaining that the price of a harmonium was far beyond his means. Uncertainty is a painful state of mind, and misfortune itself is not so trying as the apprehension of it; so thought Mr. James George, for, to relieve Mr. Ford at once, he informed him that a shilling of his money he should never see. Mr. Ford, we are sorry to say, was not grateful, he even took this proof of kindness very ill, and his resentment now found vent in words. He addressed his sister, and although he did not think it needful to enter into particulars, he said with some bitterness,

"You remember the Georges, Livy? You know how they used to come to our father's house when we were children, and spend weeks there. They were poor then, Livy, and glad of a comfortable place. Times are changed, Livy. Captain George is a fine gentleman, and lives in a villa at Brompton, and Mr. James George is a City man, who has not time to spare for an old acquaintance. Mind you don't go near Mr. James, Livy, unless it be to borrow money at fifty per cent. He has the credit of lending it freely enough at that rate, on good security, mind."

"I hope I shall never want to borrow money, John," replied Miss Lavinia; "but fifty per cent. is usury surely."

Mr. Ford laughed boisterously.

"Usury! Business, Livy—business."

His mirth had something so gloomy in it, that Miss Lavinia felt quite depressed. The children seemed very good, and John was kind, but she was afraid, she was, that sewing up the carpet or mending the sofa would not change matters much.

CHAPTER IV.

A FEW days had gone by, and Miss Ford had settled down in her new home, which Susan had condescended not to leave. Spite the unfavorable symptoms which had marked the opening of their acquaintance, Mr. Ford's sister and Mr. Ford's servant had soon tacitly discovered that they were exactly suited to each other. For Miss Ford, who had been treated like a child, and called one all her life, could manage herself and her little concerns; but was by no means fitted for command—and Susan, who, since her mistress's illness, had led and ruled the house, had totally lost the habit of obedience. Miss Ford was precisely, she soon found, the very mistress suited to such a servant; and such a servant, Miss Ford soon discovered, was the only one suited to her. The mutual oblivion, such as the Roman people decreed in their civil wars, was thrown over the unpleasant past; and stimulated by the presence of a censor, Susan condescended to keep the house cleaner, and to make it more tidy. But it was not in her power to mend the broken furniture, to paper the walls, and otherwise restore to decency the external aspect of Mr. Ford's home. Still less had she any power over that important test of domestic comfort, the larder; and Miss Lavinia soon learned, to her dismay, that though her brother lounged at home, and consumed what seemed to her a perilous quantity of spirits, meals were often scanty in his house. At first she said nothing, and quietly gave Susan money for the most pressing wants, but her stock was short; and, foreseeing that, when it was exhausted, matters would return to their primitive state, she thought it best to appeal to Mr. Ford himself. She accordingly managed to find herself alone with him in the front parlour one afternoon, and discreetly opened the matter by encomiums on her three nephews.

"Robert is really a fine lad," she said; "he grows very like you, John."

"I think he is like you, Livy," slily said Mr. Ford.

"Like me!" exclaimed Miss Lavinia, much startled.

"Why, yes. Why should he not be like his aunt? I say, Livy, I wish you would come and try that harmonium for me. I have found one—a good one I am told, but I do not like to take it without trying it."

"I cannot try a harmonium: I never played on one," said

Miss Lavinia, looking frightened ; " besides, is it not a pity to have so expensive an instrument when the poor boys——"

" What about the expense if Alicia wishes for it," petulantly interrupted Mr. Ford.

Miss Ford gave him a timid look, but continued with her quiet obstinacy :

" The boys want many things, John."

" Let them."

" And they are good boys, John."

" So much the worse for them. They will be poor men like their father," sighed Mr. Ford, softening, and casting a dreary look over the past. " Lavinia, I might be a rich man now, had I been selfish."

" That you never were, John," said Miss Ford, with tears in her eyes ; " I shall never forget when my piece of plum-cake fell into the pond——"

" Ay—ay, child," said Mr. Ford, forcing a laugh ; " but it would have been better for me if I had been more careful of my plum-cake through life."

" I cannot ask him for money now," thought Miss Ford, perceiving she had taken a false step ; " but I can tell him of the bills that came in yesterday."

But Mr. Ford was from the north, and, with all his foolish good-nature, he had plenty of northern shrewdness, though, poor fellow, he did not always put it to the best or the wisest uses. He was now quite aware, from certain nervous twitchings about Miss Lavinia's lips, that the discourse about his boys was to end in something very different from them, and he was sufficiently sharpened by daily adversity to guess that this something must be money. Poverty, amongst its other fatal attendants, has one which the great and the heroic alone can escape—meanness. Mr. Ford was mean every day of his life, far less so than many in his position ; but enough to feel and to deserve to feel the bitter sense of mortification and shame. He owed money, and he could not and would not help it ; he was not wilfully dishonest, yet he wronged the hard-working and the poor. His sister Lavinia was heartily welcome to a share of what he had ; but he was sure that she had saved money all these years, and the knowledge of that little hoard made him restless. He meant to borrow from her ; and to do so, it was urgent that she should not be the first to broach the unwelcome subject of money. Yet Mr. Ford knew in his inner heart of hearts, that though he might borrow, it was more than doubtful that he should ever

repay ; he kept that ugly fact in those dark depths of conscience where we all have something to conceal ; but it would come out in spite of himself—and then a remorseful and relenting “Poor Lavinia, let her keep it,” would be internally uttered, soon to be forgotten in the tempting vision of Lavinia’s bank-notes and shining sovereigns. Resolved to attempt securing these as soon as possible, he now artfully turned back to the plum-cake of their youthful days.

“What famous plum-cakes those were that your god-mother made, Livy,” he said, with a nod ; “I have no doubt you are quite a hand at plum-cake, too.”

“I shall be very happy to make one for the boys,” said Miss Lavinia, gently flattered ; “only you know, John, the materials.”

“I say, Livy,” hastily interrupted her brother, “you couldn’t——”

“Lend me fifty pounds,” Mr. Ford was going to add, when, to his great vexation, he caught sight of Captain George passing by the window in the square, on his way to the front door.

“Is that a visitor ?” asked Miss Lavinia, as a knock was heard at the door.

“It is,” shortly answered her brother.

“Then, I think I shall go.”

“As you please,” answered Mr. Ford, who was very much out of temper.

Miss Lavinia had only time to retire when Captain George walked in, with a “Well, old fellow ?” that was comprehensive as well as familiar.

“Well,” said Mr. Ford, carelessly tossing him the packet of papers, “it is all right enough—you may invest.”

“May I though ?” asked Captain George, with every appearance of anxiety and interest.

“Yes ; it is safe.”

“Well, and what will you do ?”

“How is Mrs. George ?” was the irrelevant reply.

“Pretty well, pretty well, thank you ; but what will you do ?”

“I ask you—how is Mrs. George ?” sternly said Mr. Ford.

“And I answer, pretty well.”

“Well, then, be satisfied.”

Captain George whistled, and took up the papers.

“A hundred pounds would do, you know.”

"This is a fine day," said Mr. Ford thrusting his hands in his pockets, and looking out of the window.

"He's in one of his tempers, when nothing will move him," said Captain George, speaking as to a third person; "that man is a rock, sir—a rock."

This speech producing no effect, Captain George, after looking in vain for the rum bottle on the table, exclaimed, seemingly struck with a sudden remembrance,

"By the way—I forgot to show you this—that may change the question, eh?"

He put another paper in Mr. Ford's hands as he spoke. Mr. Ford read it attentively. There was nothing in it but the confirmation of what he already knew; and how bitter was that knowledge! "Ah, if I had but a hundred pounds," thought Mr. Ford, with a heart full of bitterness, "or rather three or four hundred, if I could but avail myself of this opportunity, and get my share of the inevitable prize. It is so clear, so certain a success. Lavinia's money would do for present wants—for the house—for the harmonium which poor Alicia has not got yet——"

"Well!" here interrupted Captain George; "it is odd, is it not?"

"No," sharply replied Mr. Ford, thrusting back the paper upon him; "I told you it was all right."

"Well, I am sorry you are so obstinate; you always were, you know."

"Of course," said Mr. Ford.

"It is only a hundred pounds," persisted Captain George, with his hand on the lock.

"I am glad to hear it."

"Obstinate," muttered Captain George. "I'll tell you what, old fellow," he added, as they left the parlour together, "you'll die a poor man."

Mr. Ford, who was in one of his silent, surly fits, did not answer, whereat Captain George shook his head, seemingly much affected. Mr. Ford opened the door for him, and started back, surprised. On the last step of the house sat a little girl, of grave yet childish aspect. Heavy yellow curls fell round her little blooming face, lit with a pair of bright grey eyes. She sat with her elbow on her knee, and her cheek in her hand, in an attitude of patient expectation. She was handsomely—nay, richly dressed. Captain George eyed her curiously, then looked at Mr. Ford; but Mr. Ford shook his head, he knew nothing of her.

"Who are you with, child?" kindly asked Captain George, stooping, and patting her cheek.

The question was answered with pert quaintness.

"Never mind," said the little lady, without deigning to look up.

Captain George smiled, uttered an "All right, I dare say," and walked away, gaily humming a tune.

Mr. Ford re-entered the house bitter and irritated; it seemed to him as if fortune had once more fled away from his home with the papers in Captain George's pocket. He wondered how much money Captain George would invest—a thousand at least; and he rapidly calculated how much it would bring in.

"Please, sir," said Susan's voice, "is that organ coming?"

Mr. Ford winced at the question. He had deceived his wife; he had deceived even Susan; the harmonium he had found was utterly beyond his reach. He had hoped to lure his sister into purchasing it, by asking her to come and try it; and this hope, a slender one, was the only certainty he had of the instrument he had repeatedly promised to Mrs. Ford.

"Missus has been asking me about it again," continued Susan; "I think, sir, you had better tell her it can't be had, than keep her expecting."

"It can be had," sharply said Mr. Ford; "but the instrument is out of order. Tell her she shall have it by next week, at latest."

Susan went away sullen and incredulous, and Miss Lavinia timidly appeared in the hall, where Mr. Ford was still standing. She had evidently been lying in wait for her brother, and, though he guessed with what purpose, he recklessly allowed her to speak.

"John," she said, shyly, "I am sorry to trouble you again."

"Never mind, Livy," replied Mr. Ford, with an ironical sort of kindness; "go on."

"The children are rather shabby," suggested Miss Ford.

"I think you may say very shabby."

"At all events, they want new clothes, John."

"Decidedly they do, Livy."

"And then there are the bills, John. Don't you think you had better pay off a few before they accumulate?"

"A very excellent suggestion," said Mr. Ford, with the same sort of grim kindness and assent.

Considerably encouraged by so ready a hearing, Miss Lavinia proceeded.

"And if you could give me a pound or two for Susan, John, I should like it so. She was quite saucy yesterday, and, at the first word I said, threw her wages in my face."

An execration in which anger, shame, and bitterness blended, rose to Mr. Ford's lips, but did not pass them. He was not used, whatever his trials were, to have them probed so freely, and Miss Ford had not spared him one sting. His dirty and neglected children, his debts, the insolence of his servant, had all been brought up before him, and had separately added their gall to Captain George's last adieu—"Good-bye, old fellow, you'll die a poor man." Who knew it better than Mr. Ford, with mortgages, debts, and arrest, all hanging over him in a gloomy array. But what we know we cannot always bear to hear; and Mr. Ford's short conversation with Captain George had irritated him almost beyond endurance, when his sister unconsciously exasperated him still further. Seeing her startled look, he checked himself and said, sadly:

"Livvy, never talk of money to a man downhill; it puts him beside himself—it puts him beside himself, I tell you."

And excitedly snatching up his hat, Mr. Ford rushed out of the house.

CHAPTER V.

HE did not go far.

The child was still sitting on the door-step; and Mr. Ford, surprised to find her there, stopped at once. She had not moved or changed her attitude. Still she sat with her cheek resting on her hand, and seeming indifferent to the keen northern wind, that curled the withered and yellow leaves up to her feet. Mr. Ford looked at her attentively, then he laid his hand on her shoulder, and asked:

"What are you doing here, child?"

She looked up wistfully in his face. Her pertness seemed all gone; tears trembled on her long eyelashes; her lips quivered slightly.

"I am waiting for Mary," she said.

Mr. Ford looked around him. There were two gentlemen walking slowly in the enclosure of the square; but neither within it nor without did he see any token of a servant-girl.

"Why did Mary leave you?" he asked.

"She leaves me every day; she goes away, then comes back, and takes me home."

"And where is home?"

But the child seemed unable to answer this question distinctly. She spoke of a great house; but where it was, or what name it bore, or if it had any, she could not tell. It was home—and she knew no more.

"But where does your father live?" urged Mr. Ford.

"I have not got any."

"Is he dead?"

"I tell you I never had any," rather indignantly replied the little girl.

"And no mother?"

"Oh! she's gone," moaned the child; "she's gone."

"Then who takes care of you?"

"The lady."

"What lady?"

But here again the child could not explain. The lady was like home, an image distinct to her own mind—to others, vague and dull. Mr. Ford shook his head. It was plain to him that this richly-dressed delicately-nurtured child had been purposely forsaken. He put but one more question to her; he asked to know her name, half expecting her to inform him that she had not got, and had never had any. Mr. Ford was disappointed.

"My name," she replied, seeming surprised at the question; "don't you know it?"

"No, I really do not. What is it?"

"Mab."

"Mab—Mabel, perhaps?"

"No, it isn't Mabel, it's Mab."

"Little Queen Mab, eh?—and your surname, you have none, of course not."

She shook her head with impatient denial; then clasping her hands around her knees, she querulously exclaimed:

"I wish Mary would come."

But there was no sign of Mary. Mr. Ford remembered his three boys, and bad father though many would have thought him, they made his heart yearn towards the forsaken child.

"Let us wait for Mary in the house," he said; and taking her by the hand, he led her in.

She made no resistance. Perhaps she thought this was a thing agreed upon; perhaps she felt cold and tired with waiting in the square, and liked the shelter and protection of a home. They entered together the silent parlour; Miss Lavinia had gone up-stairs to cry in her room—and in that grey day it was not so

dingy and so comfortless as in the broad glare of sun-light, yet the child looked startled. Mr. Ford sat down, and took her on his knee. She seemed half frightened at the familiarity of the act; she looked a fastidious little thing, and pushed him away with mingled fright and annoyance. He gently forced her to to stay, and, in drawing her towards him, he felt something rustle like paper. He put her down abruptly, and gave her a sharp look; a letter was pinned to her little silk cloak.

Mr. Ford rose and locked the door; then he came back to the child, took the letter which bore no direction, and tore it open. A small bundle of silken papers fell out—notes—bank-notes. The blood tingled in his ears; he picked them up and counted them. There were five notes, and each note was for a hundred pounds.

At first the rush of joy was almost too great. Then came a second thought—the notes were forged; then a third, could he keep them? He hastily put that thought away, and examined the envelope. Within it were faintly traced in pencil, characters reversed, and which could only be read in a looking-glass. Mr. Ford at once went up to the mantel-piece; and, with some difficulty, made out the following words:

“A distressed mother appeals to Mr. Ford’s humanity. If he will keep the child and rear her like his own, the £500 enclosed are his. She will be claimed some day—God alone knows when. Inquiry is useless, and will only cause any future assistance to be withheld.”

Mr. Ford hastily thrust this paper in his pocket and turned to the child. She stood where he had left her, and stared at him amazed and silent.

“Hush!” he said, though she had not spoken; “hush, Mary will come.”

He left the room and locked her in, but without taking the key; then he went up to his sister’s room and hurriedly tapped at the door.

“Livy,” he said, when she opened it, “lend me fifty pounds, will you?”

Words cannot render Miss Lavinia’s profound amazement.

“Fifty pounds!” she gasped.

“Yes. I want them for Alicia’s harmonium. I have the money, of course, but I cannot spare it, and she has set her heart on that harmonium. I tell you I have money.” Mr. Ford hastily produced his bundle of notes and rustled them in Miss Lavinia’s face with another hasty, “Now don’t shilly-shally,

let me have those fifty pounds: you shall have them back next week, and with capital interest, Livy."

Poor Miss Ford was completely subdued by her brother's manners and bank-notes. Not two minutes before he was bitter, complaining, and poor—now he spoke with the easy insolence of wealth.

"I have not got fifty pounds," she said; "but I have thirty-seven pounds eighteen shillings and sixpence."

"Thirty-five will do then," said Mr. Ford, rapidly calculating that the two pound odd would do for Susan, "only let me have them quickly."

"I must take off my boot, then," said Miss Lavinia, for in this useful article of her dress she kept her money when she travelled.

"Do what you like, so you be quick," replied her brother, taking a turn on the landing.

Miss Lavinia closed the door, then re-appeared after a while with four notes, much creased. Her brother took them from her with a hasty, "Thank you, Livy, all right," then hurried downstairs without heeding her prudential recommendation, "to be careful of the money."

An empty cab was passing by when Mr. Ford left the square; he hailed it and drove at once to the dealer in second-hand instruments, where, after much labor, he had succeeded in discovering such an harmonium as would suit his wife, though the obdurate dealer had refused to surrender it without payment. Here Miss Lavinia's thirty-five pounds effected the miracle which Mr. Ford's eloquence had not attained, and he left the house master of the coveted harmonium.

"Number seven Woodbine Terrace, Brompton," said Mr. Ford, re-entering the cab which he had kept waiting. "Poor Alicia, how pleased she will be," was his first thought. His next was, "Are the notes safe?" He felt for them in a tremor. They were safe, and he counted and examined them again. "I wonder what Captain George will think," was his next exulting reflection.

Number seven Woodbine Terrace was one of the pretty little old-fashioned villas, such as were still to be found in Brompton some years ago. The mild air of that locality had been found to agree with Mrs. George, and Woodbine Cottage had agreed with her particularly well. It was one storey high, and stood in its own grounds, as Captain George facetiously observed. It had a grass plot in front, and behind a garden, which, being sur-

rounded by other gardens, allowed flowers to grow, and could even boast a few trees, and a honeysuckle arbour. The door, on being opened by a neat servant, showed a pleasant vision of cool green beyond the hall, and a small back parlour, into which Mr. Ford was ushered, had the same agreeable look of verdure. It was full of choice plants on stands; cages of birds hung in the bow window, a parrot on his perch lifted his drowsy head, and turned his bright eyes on Mr. Ford, and an aged dog, blind and helpless, growled in his basket, but without stirring.

"Mrs. George's pets," said Mr. Ford, with the sneer which he had for every taste, wise or foolish, in which he did not sympathize.

"Master's too," replied the servant. "Hush, Flo! Master took her in a week ago."

"What! that old creature?"

"Yes, sir, more fit to be thrown in the river than anything; but master's so. We have an Italian boy down-stairs that just drives me beside myself—a little lame beggar. Any name, sir?"

"Mr. Ford."

"All right—all right," said Captain George, thrusting his head in through the folding-doors, and nodding pleasantly at Mr. Ford; "what's up, old fellow?"

"I should just like a few words with you."

"Have a cup of tea first."

"No, I must go home."

"We'll see about that. Well, old Flo?" He stretched out a caressing hand to the spaniel, who, leaving her basket, came crawling towards him, whining with pleasure, and finally crept up on his knee.

"No danger of your making such a fool of yourself, eh?" said Captain George, nudging Mr. Ford's elbow, and still stroking Flo's head.

"A matter of taste," replied Mr. Ford, with a disdainful smile. "I called to tell you that I have changed my mind about that matter; I will have those shares."

Captain George whistled, and stared at his cousin.

"A deep fellow," he said at length; "ain't he, Flo? I suppose you want the shares this evening," he added, in a business-like tone.

Mr. Ford nodded.

Captain George looked at him, and rubbed his chin.

"Business is business," he said; "have you brought the money?"

Mr. Ford thrust his hand in his pocket and threw a bundle of bank-notes on the table. Captain George picked them up, smoothed them open, caressed them, as it were, and smiled; then he put them down carefully, and, opening a bureau, he drew out some pink-coloured papers, which he handed to Mr. Ford. The two men exchanged glances.

"Why had you those shares here?" mistrustfully asked Mr. Ford.

Captain George winked, and looked most wickedly knowing.

"Saw it in your eye all the time, old fellow. Captain George looks foolish, but he has been in the wars; Captain George can read an eye."

That Captain George could read an eye was probably very true, but that Captain George had ever been in the wars was one of those matters which sceptical people doubted. The curious had discovered that Captain George had never been in the British service; and Captain George himself so often spoke of Mexico and Peru, that, though he did not say so, Southern America was by the credulous fixed upon as the scene of his exploits.

In his heart of hearts Mr. Ford did not believe that his cousin George had ever held command in any but a militia regiment, and as with the first touch of prosperity the man's whole heart naturally opened, his answer to Captain George's declaration that he had been in the wars was the insolent question:

"And have you really been in the wars, Captain George?"

It was said that Captain George had fought duels on less provocation than this, but he was now pacifically inclined, and, facetiously bidding Mr. Ford take as many shares as he pleased, he watched him doing so with good-humoured patience.

"And now," said he, "that instead of a hundred pounds you are investing five—not fair, old fellow—you will not mind putting your name to these bits of paper. I don't know how you came by them, you know."

"How should I have come by them?" sharply asked Mr. Ford.

"How can I tell? But I have been in the wars, and so you will please to write your name on the backs of these little silky gentlemen."

Mr. Ford obeyed with a scornful air; the pink papers sank in his pocket, the silky gentlemen, as Captain George called them, entered the bureau, and the business was over.

"And now you'll take a cup of tea," said Captain George.

"I don't mind if I do," replied Mr. Ford, with sudden good-humour; "How is Mrs. George?"

"So, so," replied Captain George—"so, so: walk in."

He pushed the folding-doors open, and Mr. Ford entered a pretty, and especially a comfortable parlour, where Mrs. George sat by a bright fire, presiding over a fairly laid out tea-table. Mrs. George, whom Captain George had married for love many years before, had been pretty, it was said, but time, which often respects plain faces, works sad changes in beauty; and now she was a plain woman enough; with a red nose, small grey eyes, and a long chin, but over all a motherly sort of look, which, joined to a pleasant voice and manner, rendered her a general favourite. Of her virtues as well as of her beauty, Captain George spoke freely. It was hard to say whether he did so through habit, love, or because he was of a boastful temper. One thing was certain, that, though a most faithless husband, he was devotedly attached to his wife. She loved him no less, and, to the few who knew them and their whole history, that strange love afforded room for speculation.

"And how is Mr. Ford?" asked Mrs. George in her kindest tones, and with her most benevolent smile; "quite a stranger of late."

She shook her finger at him, whilst Mr. Ford looked foolish. The world had not softened his northern bluntness, and this forbade either excuse or apology. He took refuge in his cup of tea, and looked at the fire.

"I think we must have that boy up," said Mrs. George to her husband.

"I think we must, my love, Sarah does not like him."

Mrs. George rang the bell; the Italian boy was ordered up, and soon came in limping.

Captain and Mrs. George looked complacently at him; a side-table was laid out by Mrs. George's own hands, and, to Mr. Ford's profound surprise, the Italian boy was told to take his tea, with the addition of some cold meat which Sarah brought up for his use, looking deeply disgusted. Little mattered her looks; Mrs. George poured out the boy's tea, and Captain George carved his meat, and both watched him eating with evident enjoyment. He ate but little, poor child; a pale, sickly boy he was, with a worn and hollow face, and large sunken eyes, that told of much suffering in London streets.

"And where is Flo?" asked Mrs. George; "why is not Flo here?—she would like her tea too—poor old Flo!"

The door was opened, and in came Flo, very slowly, but growling at the boy with unsubdued jealousy and anger.

"Never mind Flo," said Captain George, laughing; "never mind her, Giachino. She has no teeth—only spite—Eh! you old Flo."

"What on earth do you mean to do with that cross old beast?" Mr. Ford could not help asking.

"Why, feed and keep her until she dies, of course."

Mr. Ford looked his disgust. Captain George struck his fist on the table, till the tea-things rang again, and said, with much emphasis, though without anger.

"You may laugh, Mr. Ford, but Flo's mistress was an old flame of mine, as no one knows better than Mrs. George"—here he gave a wink to his wife who smiled—"and when she died a week back, I vowed that Flo should have a bit and a sup whilst I lived. Eh! old Flo?"

Flo, who, to say the truth, was an old friend of Captain George's, and had known him since her birth, fondly licked his hand by way of reply.

"Every one to his taste," said Mr. Ford rising; "but what will you do with that young vagabond," he added, as the door closed on the Italian boy, who, after uttering his pretty *grazie tante*, limped away—"not belonging to an old flame of yours, is he?"

Mr. Ford said this with tolerable insolence, for such was his unfortunate temper. He was one of those men of whom nature has decreed that they shall never know how to joke.

"No—no—no," said Captain George, waving his hand with graceful denial; "nothing of that kind. We'll wait till his foot is well, to think about what we shall do with him; he is no trouble in the meanwhile—poor little Giachino! I picked him up starving, sir—starving! Ugh! what a state of society this is!"

Mr. Ford reddened deeply. He remembered the little stranger at home. Were his motives as pure as those of that scapegrace Captain George, who was known to live by his wits, to cheat, to trick, and whom every man despised, and no man trusted.

"Good night," he said, hurriedly.

"Good night, Mr. Ford," sweetly said Mrs. George.

Her husband saw their guest to the door. Then he gave him one of his favorite thrusts in the ribs, and said, knowingly,

"Had the money all the time, eh?—sly boots!"

Mr. Ford laughed, entered the cab, and drove away. Captain George returned to the parlour. His wife gave him a look. "All right," he said, laying his finger to his nose; "all right, my dear."

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Miss Lavinia's first amazement was over, she began to feel alarmed at her facility. She no longer heard her brother's confident tones, nor was she dazzled by the sight of the bank-notes. Besides, since he wanted them for something else, it was just as if he had not got them; and since he had them, why did he require her thirty-five pounds? Surely Mrs. Ford could do without the harmonium for a day or two. At all events, it was very odd why *her* money had to go!

"I dare say he has not gone yet," thought Miss Lavinia. "Perhaps if I were to go down and have a convincing talk with him, he would give me back the notes."

Downstairs Miss Lavinia went; but Mr. Ford was not in the parlour, and in his stead, to the lady's amazement she found a strange child fast asleep on the rickety sofa. The sight at first took her breath away. Miss Lavinia had always cherished a passive dislike for animals and for children. She, of course, tolerated her three nephews, and did not object to the presence of a cat in the kitchen; but this little creature, come she knew not where from, and sleeping there coiled up like a silky spaniel, alarmed and disturbed her.

She looked at Mab, then she walked away. Then she came back and sat down, and looked at her again, and still the child slept on soundly. At length, unable to bear this extraordinary event in silence, Miss Lavinia precipitately left the room. She went to seek her adviser in cases of domestic difficulty, Susan, and as usual, the conversation took place over the banisters.

"Susan!" she called out, dolefully. "Susan—do you hear me?"

"Yes, marm," answered Susan's sharp voice from below; "on course I do."

"Susan, I am in such distress!"

Susan, not considering that this declaration of trouble required any comment, uttered none.

"Susan, will you come up, please?"

"Indeed, ma'am, I can't—I am too busy."

"But, Susan, I do want you. What child is this in the parlour?"

"What!" screamed Susan.

"What child?—do come and look at it."

Susan, confounded at what she heard, now appeared at the head of the staircase, and, giving a scowl around her, as if she were looking for some noxious reptile, imperiously asked "where it was."

"In the parlour," said Miss Lavinia.

Susan entered the parlour at once, and stared at the little girl, who, awakened out of her sleep by their loud talking, sat up on the sofa, and looked half ready to cry.

"Who are you?—what brought you here?"

The child, offended at Susan's tone and looks, buried her face in the pillow, and would not reply.

"What shall we do with her?" asked Miss Lavinia.

Susan gave her an odd look, pursed up her lips, shut her small eyes, shook her head, and, without answering proceeded to walk downstairs to the kitchen. Miss Ford hastily called her back.

"Susan, take it with you; I cannot stay with it in the parlour."

"Then lock the door, ma'am; I ain't a-going to have it in my kitchen. Besides, those that let it in, can let it out."

"What shall I do?" exclaimed Miss Lavinia, wringing her hands piteously.

Comfort came from a quarter whence Miss Lavinia had not been wont to expect it since her arrival in this house. A sharp double knock at the door announced the return of her three nephews, who had been out for a walk. She opened the door herself, hoping to derive from them either information or support. They rushed in, in their boisterous fashion, and their first breathless exclamation was, "What's there for dinner?"

For, unlike Captain George, Mr. Ford kept genteel hours.

"Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding," replied Miss Lavinia.

The three brothers uttered an exclamation of dismay. Yorkshire pudding was an old and scandalous invasion of the fundamental law, that pudding follows meat. Disgusted though they felt, William and Edward went down to the kitchen, in the hopes of better things. Miss Ford looked at her eldest nephew, and faltered:

"Robert, there is a child in the parlour. Do you know who and what she is?"

"Let's see her," replied Robert, and, putting his aunt aside, he entered the parlour.

The child raised her head from the pillow, against which she had hidden her face. It was covered with tears, yet her fair hair, her blooming complexion had too much beauty, and her attire was too costly, for both not to strike Robert with surprise.

"Who brought her?" he asked, looking at Miss Lavinia.

"I don't know—I don't know anything about her."

"Nor I. Who are you, little girl?" The child turned sulkily away. "I dare say papa knows," said Robert, carelessly; and he first pushed with his foot, then picked up a crumpled paper. Miss Lavinia looked inquiringly at him.

"It is only an old letter," said Robert, hurriedly, and he thrust it into his pocket. "I think I'll go upstairs, aunt."

And, without heeding his aunt's slow remonstrance, upstairs Robert went. He there found his two brothers quarrelling. He soon restored peace between them.

"There's a little girl below."

The information was received with a derisive shout.

"There is," emphatically resumed Robert. "You go and see her."

Edward would much rather not have gone, but Robert's will was law, and down he went. He soon returned with startled looks, beckoning from the staircase to William, who at once obeyed the summons. Robert heard them go downstairs whispering; he listened for a while, then shut the door, and took out the paper from his pocket. It was the letter his father had received with the bank-notes. Robert was puzzled, at first, by the reversed characters, then suddenly their meaning flashed across his mind—he went to the little cracked looking-glass hanging between the two windows, held up the letter, and, though somewhat slowly, he, too, came to a knowledge of its contents.

"Oh, what a beauty!—looking at himself," said the voice of William, who had entered unheard, and now stood behind his brother. Robert turned round, and he was so dreadfully pale that William drew back frightened.

"I'll tell you what," said Robert, in a voice that shook with passion, "if you do that again, I'll—I'll strike you."

William was a good-humoured, patient lad, but this uncalled for threat roused his ire.

"Will you," he said—"will you?" and he flew at Robert,

who had barely time to defend himself, and whose surprise at the attack helped to cool his anger.

"Don't be a fool, Bill!" said he, pushing back his young brother. "I don't want to hurt you—you ninny! Why, I could double you up in no time."

There was, unfortunately, no doubt about that, and Bill's excitement wisely found vent in tears, which Robert allowed to flow, quietly thrusting back the letter into his pocket, whilst William was too much moved to mind him.

"And now do let me be quiet, will you," continued Robert, with the look and tone of a premature man.

The school of adversity has its drawbacks for youth. Robert had found it a hard one. Years had modified the faults which had pierced his mother's proud heart; but though he grew up with her beauty, her reserve, and her pride, he lost none of that vanity which was his father's prevailing error and misfortune. It had been wounded at every turn; the poverty of his home, his shabby clothes, his father's beggared reputation, had given it many a cruel sting, but had failed to conquer it, though they had, indeed, compelled it to silence and a passive existence. The very hardships and sufferings, which that vanity had made it cruel to endure, bore sad fruit. Robert grew up in the conviction that there is nothing like money and a fair name. The wealthy, safe, reputable side of life's high-road attracted him irresistibly. Respectability was Robert's youthful ideal. Poor lad! he could not help prizing that of which he felt the want so keenly. The son of a poor man, unable to acquire more than a very secondary education—unable, as he felt beforehand, to make his way in one of those professions where men win money and repute—what could he ever be? These feelings passed vaguely through Robert's mind; they were feelings and not thoughts, for his character was more formed than his intellectual faculties were developed. He studied hard, but with more application than success; yet work is certain of its rewards, and slow but sure might be applied to him.

But though the blight which had fallen on Robert's childhood, and on his home, since his mother's illness, had forced some fatal defects and dangerous feelings into premature existence, it is but fair to add, that some genuine qualities, some fair blossoms, had sprung up amongst the weeds. Robert had early learned to think little of his father—poor Mr. Ford had found the world in the heart of his own child, yet Robert had had the self-command not to betray his feelings, and even to veil them

with a tolerable show of filial respect. There lay his strength—he could forbear—he could suffer in silence, and neither complain nor repine; and that secret and unfortunate contempt which he conceived for the parent he should have revered, helped to foster the tenderness which he felt for his younger brothers. William was but three years his junior and Edward seven, but Robert, seeing how weak and helpless their father was, had learned to treat them with genuine, though imperious fondness, and taught them to rely on his support, and obey his authority. Childhood goes to strength as flowers turn to the sun, and William and Edward knew no law save the will of Robert. As a rule he was just to them. He protected them against insult and attack, fought all their battles, and would have done without his dinner before they should want. There was boyish vanity in this assumption of protection and power, but there was a fine and generous feeling too; the sense in which his father lamentably failed of what we owe to those with whom God has given us the ties of kindred.

But, as we all know, this is a feeling which is often allied with a sort of selfishness. Miss Lavinia's arrival was not seen by Robert with much pleasure, for she came a burden to this overladen home. He softened, however, when he saw the comparative decency she introduced into it. Respectability, under one of its many aspects, appeared before Robert's mind, and he had sense enough to feel his aunt's value. But very different was the vista which opened with the letter he had just read; money, actual money was coming with the little fair-haired girl on the sofa below. Five hundred pounds! the sum seemed incalculable wealth. The poor boy's heart beat with emotion. Five hundred pounds!—comfort, competency, honour, the world's esteem; education and a career for his brothers. He felt dizzy and faint, and William's fierce attack did him infinite good: it cooled and steadied him, and rendered thought an easier task.

"I'll not tell papa I've seen the letter," was Robert's first thought. "I'll keep it," was his second.

But where find a safe hiding place? He looked around the room, and saw none that would be more than temporary. Yet one he was compelled to adopt. William had gone downstairs again—he was alone, and could do as he pleased. He thrust the letter folded small behind the chest of drawers, then whistling carelessly, though alone, he walked downstairs.

Miss Ford had left the parlour, and the two young Fords

were in it, amusing themselves with teasing the poor little stranger. William danced around her making faces, to her great rage and vexation; whilst Edward every now and then gave her yellow locks a pull.

"Ain't you ashamed of yourselves to tease a girl so," sternly said Robert. "Don't be afraid, little girl," he added as his brothers slunk away. "I'll settle the first who touches you."

Mab's protection was ensured from that hour; but, unconscious of her debt, and feeling insulted by the familiarity of Robert's address, she said somewhat haughtily,

"I am not a little girl—I am a lady. And if *he* were here," she added, her eyes filling with angry tears, "he would strike you as he did the boy who provoked me."

"Would he!" said Robert with much disdain.

"I should like to see him hit Robert," ironically exclaimed William.

"I tell you he would!" cried the little stranger, stamping her foot; "he is taller and stronger than Robert, as you call him."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Ned and Bill on hearing this heresy.

"Let her alone," loftily said Robert, with generous forgiveness; "she knows no better. Come here, little girl, and tell me who is he."

"I don't know," sobbed the child, "but he shook the cherry-tree, and the cherries fell—oh! so fast!"

This was not much to the purpose, and Robert's further inquiries failed to elicit clearer information. Not even her name of Mab would the child confess, but, weeping bitterly, asked to go to Mary; and turning from sorrow to wrath, again threatened them with the assurance that "*he* would punish them well, he would. And you are a rude boy," she added for Robert's special benefit.

Robert did not condescend to resent the taunt, and his father's entrance put an end to the scene.

"What's up?" he said carelessly; "well, little one, how are you?"

"Mary—Mary!" sobbed the little girl on seeing him.

Mr. Ford was affected; he sat down and took the weeping child on his knee.

"You are but a poor forsaken little thing after all," he said with some emotion; "but you have got a home—don't cry—there, don't! We'll take care of you."

"Is the little girl going to stay, pa?" asked Robert, with a look of well-assumed wonder.

"She is."

"And what is her name, pa? She would not tell us."

"Her name is Mab—is it not, dear?"

"Ye—s," sobbed the child.

"That is a short name," said Robert, looking fixedly at his father.

"Her name is Mab—Winter," answered Mr. Ford.

"That was grandmother's name," said Robert.

There was something too pointed in the lad's manner to escape his father. He was a weak and passionate man, and, stamping his foot, he turned on Robert with sudden wrath.

"How dare you stand and con my words, young sir?" he said, stammering with rage.

Mab, frightened at such unexpected violence, ran away, and, in her terror, took refuge between William and Edward, who, amazed at seeing Robert reproved by their ever-yielding parent, remained mute and still. Robert turned red, then pale, and fixing a reproachful look on his flushed and angry father, he said with some firmness and dignity, "I meant no harm."

Nor had he. He had meant no insult, no reproach—it was Mr. Ford's own secret heart that had given his words their sting, and, his first wrath over, Mr. Ford knew it better than Robert. He knew what it was that had exasperated him, how and why he had felt defied, but, raising his voice louder to disguise his secret regret, he said with assumed sternness,

"Hold your tongue, sir: I will not have the child meddled with—remember that."

Thus, twice within a quarter of an hour, Mab's inviolability was proclaimed by both father and son in her new home.

"And now," said Mr. Ford, relaxing into his easy, good-humored tone, "let us see if there is nothing in my pocket that will make you four good friends."

He produced a good-sized but decidedly flattened parcel as he spoke.

"I must have sat on it," exclaimed Mr. Ford, dismayed, and opening it he displayed fragments of a cake that looked indeed as if it had undergone some such operation. He rubbed his forehead, and looked perplexed, but soon rallying, he philosophically remarked:

"I dare say it is none the worse for it. There, take it—divide it fair; and let little Queen Mab's share be the largest,"

he added, unconscious of the contradiction this double behest implied.

Edward, William, and Mab herself seemed quite of opinion that the cake was none the worse for its misfortune; for they divided it most amicably. Robert remained aloof; his father slapped him on the back.

"I have not forgotten you, Bob," he said, kindly; "you go to school to-morrow, and in the meanwhile take this," and he put in his hand a handsome case of mathematical instruments, long wished, but scarcely hoped for by the ambitious boy.

Robert reddened with joy, and could scarcely falter his thanks; his father sighed with pleasure and relief, as, sinking back in his chair, he watched the happy children, Mab the merriest of all. It was something to know that henceforth he could gratify them without stint, that henceforth they need fear neither the bitterness nor the disgrace of poverty.

CHAPTER VII.

MONEY is a wonderful thing. Mab's five hundred pounds did Mr. Ford all the good in the world. This sum had found him depressed, gloomy, and worried; it restored him in no time to his genial good-humour and buoyant spirits. Mr. Ford was convinced that his investment was a safe one, and he acted on the belief that time would multiply it tenfold. He had a forgiving, hospitable temper, and the very next morning he went about among his friends and acquaintances, renewing broken ties, and extending invitations. He went about among the tradesmen, too, talking loudly of his improved circumstances, promising speedy payment; and so convincing was his eloquence, contracting a few more debts. But the greatest change of all was that which Mr. Ford showed in his own home; it was sudden and complete. He took the children on his knee at breakfast; he did not swear; he drank very little spirits. The man's whole nature was thawed in the pleasant warmth of unexpected prosperity. Very kind, too, was he to the forsaken child who had thus become an inmate of his house and a member of his family. He questioned her in private on the evening of her arrival, and his questions were careful and close; but he ascertained nothing save that, for some period of time, she must have been kept in complete ignorance of all that concerned herself. Now and then, when he pressed some point, such as her surname, the home she

had been reared in, with the names of the people she had known, Mab would look deeply perplexed. It was plain that she once had had the usual amount of childish information on these points, and that memory had kept vague traces of the knowledge; but it was plain, too, that she had not been cast forth on the world's broad waters with any of that troublesome information remaining on her mind. Some process, which Mr. Ford conjectured to have been almost complete seclusion, had evidently been adopted to secure her oblivion of what it was wished she should not mention. She had probably been kept in some country house, between a lady and Mary, her servant, until it was ascertained that, with the rapid forgetfulness of her years, she could no longer betray the history of her little past. Perhaps a more acute and persevering examiner than Mr. Ford could have learned more from the child: but his curiosity was not so strong as the sense of his real interest, and prudently remaining content with the sudden piece of good fortune which had visited him under Mab's aspect, he strove no more for knowledge, which, if gained, might have proved inconvenient; and he strictly forbade "the child to be teased with useless inquiries," as he expressed it.

Miss Lavinia was too discreet not to obey her brother's rather severely uttered behest; but people's thoughts are free, and after long and mature deliberation and many painful and concientious struggles, she internally came to the conclusion that Mab Winter should have been Mab Ford. Susan, too, though on grounds that would have horrified poor Miss Lavinia, could she have suspected them, concluded "that the little monkey was a Ford every bit of her;" and Robert, convinced that she was not, and could not be a Winter, did his best to ascertain who and what she was the very next morning that followed her first appearance.

His attempt was made in the back parlour after breakfast. Mab was already accustomed to her new home, and though she had flatly refused to sleep with Miss Lavinia, and had insisted on having a bed to herself the preceding evening, she had shown herself tractable and lovable in other respects. With Robert she was at home in half an hour, and indeed in less.

"Mab, you are to call me cousin," he said; "just as you are to call papa uncle, and our aunt Lavinia, aunt." Mab nodded.

"And don't be afraid of William or Edward, Mab, I shall take care of you."

"I am not afraid."

"I shall teach you, Mab; papa said so; do you know your letters?"

"No."

"Then look here; this is A, and that is B: do you see?"

Mab's bright eyes opened wide. She went through the whole alphabet in less than a quarter of an hour, and, to her teacher's great amazement, she learned it as fast as she went through it.

"She is a wonderful child," thought Robert, unaware that whilst he imagined Mab was learning, she was only remembering, "and I shall teach her all I know."

It was when they had gone thus far that Robert's questions began.

"There," he said "he never taught you your letters, did he?"

"But he would not let the boy beat me," cried Mab, firing up, "and he took me in his arms and kissed me—and I love him."

"What is his name?" asked Robert.

"I don't know, but I love him."

"That's nonsense, Mab," coolly said Robert, "you cannot love a person whose name you do not know."

Mab vowed she did, and the conversation which Robert had begun, in the hope of acquiring information, ended in a half-quarrel.

"Mab, do not be naughty, or I shall punish you," authoritatively said Robert.

"He will not let you," derisively replied Mab.

"We shall see that, Miss."

There is no knowing what might have followed if a shuffling noise in the hall, as of men carrying some weighty piece of furniture, had not disturbed the pair. Robert opened the door, and Mab drew to his side and peeped out. Two porters, acting under Mr. Ford's whispered directions, were cautiously moving a strange square mass muffled in green baize.

"Softly, very softly," says Mr. Ford. "Susan, come here," and he whispered lower still. "Lure her into the back room, Susan, lure her into the bed-room, I want to surprise her—and Susan, you know what I told you, no need to trouble her about that."

His look seeks Mab, and Susan nods grimly—of course not, there is no need to trouble missus about that.

"What is it?" asks Mab, struck with secret awe.

"Don't ask questions," replies Robert, looking superior, and reluctant to confess his own ignorance; "besides, it is no business of yours."

"It is," says Mab, indignant.

And it is indeed. Miss Lavinia's thirty-five pounds shall be refunded, but who is to pay for Mrs. Ford's harmonium in the end?—it is you, poor little Mab, it is you.

"Come in and go on with the lesson," said Robert, who, having guessed what burden the porters were carrying up-stairs, no longer felt any interest in the subject. But Mab, though endowed with great facility for learning, was not studious by nature. She now heard William and Edward in the garden at the back of the house, and she longed to be with them. In vain Robert pulled her in, in vain he proceeded from the alphabet to the delightful task of spelling; Mab listened with big envious sighs to the happy shouts and laughter of the boys, and wholly disregarded the efforts of her teacher.

"I wish you would let me go," she said, plaintively.

She stood at his knee, pretty and entreating. Robert smiled down at her with conscious power, and bade her tell her name forthwith.

"Mab."

"Mab what?"

"I don't know."

"You do, Miss, but you are stubborn."

"Indeed I don't know, Bob."

"Well then, since you don't know, you must learn—you must know how to spell, Mab."

Mab pouted.

"Mab," said Robert, looking shocked, "do you want to remain ignorant all your life?"

"I don't care," petulantly said Mab.

"Mab, I thought you were ambitious."

"No. I want to play."

"Mab, if you do not behave better I shall not marry you."

For a matrimonial scheme had already been privately discussed between these two.

"I don't care—I shall marry William—I promised this morning."

Robert's face darkened, and as jealousy and revenge are natural to disappointed love in its earliest stages, he forthwith ordered Mab to spell the word "examination."

Mab had learned her letters without effort, but "examination" was beyond her. She pouted, sulked, and at last cried, but Robert was obdurate; examination she must spell before she left the room. Then Mab resorted to coaxing; she gave Robert a slight pinch, after the fashion of rural lovers; his face softened a little, and he said, "let go," very mildly, but still he persisted in "examination."

"Oh! Bob," whispered Mab, rising on tiptoe to reach her tutor's ear, "I shall love you so if you will let me go."

"I don't want you to love me. I will have nothing to do with an ignorant little thing like you. William is welcome to have you."

"Oh! Bob, I really will have you—I really will!"

In short, the word "examination" was dismissed from their councils. Bob allowed himself to be pacified, and Mab again solemnly promising to marry him and no one else, she was allowed by her lover and liege lord to make her escape into the garden. Robert found more pleasure in remaining alone in the parlour; he had a turn for mechanics, and his leisure moments were devoted to miniature mills, fortresses, and bridges, all rather straight and angular, but genuine looking articles for all that.

In the meanwhile, Mab enjoyed herself to her heart's content with Edward and William. She promptly confided to the latter the unfavorable turn their love matters had taken; but William, a rosy good-humoured boy, told her at once not to mind, and that he did not care, a declaration which Mab received with a shrewd nod, and which was immediately followed by what William called "a jolly game."

The garden was rather a wild place, as all such gardens are when they are surrendered to boys. A wooden bench between two poplars adorned one extremity, and a ruined summer-house stood at the other. Flowers there were none, but gloomy ivy covered the walls, and hid at least the smoke-dried brick, so dreary to the eye. Ned was busy in the summer-house digging a grave for a dead sparrow, rescued too late from the cat's cruel jaws; and William, struck with a bright idea, at once imparted it to Mab in a low whisper.

"Suppose you go and hide from Ned."

Mab received the suggestion with transport, and stole away on tiptoe. But where should she hide? Not with Robert in the back parlour, nor with Mr. Ford in the front. Not with sour-looking Susan in the kitchen, nor with shrinking Miss

Lavinia up-stairs. She stole up, meditating concealment in the boys' room, but on reaching the first floor her mind changed. That morning, as she came down-stairs, she had asked Susan who lived there, and Susan had sternly replied :

"Boguey."

"And who is Boguey?"

"A dreadful creature with horns."

"I don't believe in him," replied Mab, with much scorn. Nor did she; she was a sceptical child as well as a bold one. Dear to her also was anything that savoured of forbidden fruit; and as Susan had injudiciously crowned her description of Boguey's personal appearance with the most severe prohibitions ever to attempt opening the door on the first floor landing, holding out dark hints of the chastisement that would follow disobedience, Mab no sooner found herself before it, unwatched and unchecked, than irresistible temptations assailed her.

To open the door, look in, see what Boguey was really like, and ascertain if Boguey really existed, and to do that in spite of Susan's warnings and threats, was too great an indulgence for Mab to dream of hesitating. At once her hand was on the lock, and, with scarcely a moment's pause, she boldly walked in.

She saw a handsome though darkened room. It seemed vacant, and she softly stepped across the carpet to the window. On her way she perceived the arm-chair in which Mrs. Ford sat day after day. It was empty; and Mab, who had an indolent as well as an inquisitive temper, and who, moreover, thought this an excellent hiding-place, jumped into it at once. Gathering her feet under her, she sat there for some time, chuckling as she thought of Ned's and even of William's perplexity; and wondering in what part of the house they were carrying on their researches. She was growing impatient, however, and wearying of her own stillness, and of their slowness at finding her out, when sounds rich, though soft, of solemn religious music, suddenly woke in the room. Had Mab been older and capable of reasoning, she might have felt frightened to hear this seemingly solitary apartment alive with strains so sweet; as it was, she only felt amazed and delighted. She listened for a time, remaining quite still; then curiosity prevailing over awe, she cautiously looked round the edge of the chair. Rising above the dark line of the harmonium, she saw a pale face with upraised look and parted lips; Mab was frightened, and jumped to her feet with a scream. At once the music abruptly ceased, and a tall lady, clad in ghostly black, stood before her speechless with amazement.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Who—what are you?—what brings you here?" at length gasped the lady.

Mab did not answer.

"Speak, child, who are you?—what is your name?"

"Why, Mab, of course," petulantly answered Mab, who was rather tired of hearing that question since the preceding afternoon.

"Mab—what Mab?"

"Mab Winter."

"And where do you live?"

"Why, here, to be sure."

"In this house?—why—then, who are you?"

"I have already told you," replied Mab, with some temper.

Mrs. Ford rang the bell, and Susan, who was on her way upstairs on another errand, entered the room almost at the same moment.

"Who is this child?" exclaimed Mrs. Ford, stamping her foot, and speaking with an imperious loudness to which she had long been a stranger.

"You little hussy, you!" said Susan, angrily shaking her fist at the offender, who laughed in her face unabashed.

"Take her away!—take her away!" exclaimed Mrs. Ford, with uncontrollable impatience.

And without more ado Mab was bundled out of the room; Susan, having shut the door, softly and carefully returned to her mistress.

"It was that it might not trouble you, ma'am, that Mr. Ford said you were not to know anything about it," said Susan, standing near the arm-chair, into which her mistress had sunk exhausted.

Mrs. Ford's hands twitched nervously at her long dark robe, before she said again:

"Who is she?"

"La! don't take on so, ma'am. It is not what you think—Mr. Ford be too fond of you for that—and I have no doubt that it was for charity he took her in when he found her yesterday sitting on the door-step."

Still Mrs. Ford's hands were restless.

"La! ma'am, don't you think anything of the kind," per-

sisted Susan ; " though, if I must say a bit of my mind, I will say it out—there—it is Miss Ford's child—there."

" Miss Ford's child ! " slowly repeated Mrs. Ford. She had not seen her sister-in-law for many years, and now a sudden thought seemed to strike her.

" What sort of a woman is Miss Ford ? " she asked ; " young—fair ? "

" She has been young," prudently answered Susan ; " and she is fair and blue-eyed ; and I do think, ma'am, that she is the mother of the child."

Mrs. Ford rose to her feet with sudden energy. A terrible suspicion had seized her. What if the person who had entered her husband's house under the name of Miss Ford were not his sister ? What if she were that last and deepest insult which can be offered to an outraged woman—a rival in her own home ! Worse still, the mother of a child destined to rival her children in their father's heart !

Seven years of solitude had shaken the balance of Mrs. Ford's mind. She could not see the cruel wrong of such a suspicion. It possessed her and roused her to a sudden strength and action. Without saying a word to Susan, she walked to the door.

" Ma'am—ma'am ! " cried Susan, at her wits' end ; " you must not go down—indeed, you must not—the place is all upside down to-day ; besides—besides ———"

" So, it is true," interrupted her mistress. " I was not mistaken ; I have lived to be wronged in my own home."

" For God's sake, ma'am, do not think that ! " cried Susan ; " do not, ma'am."

She spoke in vain. Mrs. Ford had opened the door, the threshold of which she had not crossed for seven years, and with a steady step she went down the staircase. There was no one to wonder, no one to impede her progress ; the street door had just closed on Mr. Ford, and Robert and his brothers were gone to school. Susan still followed her mistress imploringly, saying, " Don't, pray don't, ma'am ! " but she was not heeded. Though dazzled by the light she had so long been unused to, Mrs. Ford reached the bottom of the staircase safely, and at once opened the parlour door ; but she did not enter.

When she saw that dreary room with its broken and tattered furniture, with its squalid walls and its ragged carpet, she remained one moment mute, then she turned round, and looked at Susan with angry surprise.

"It is no use, ma'am," said Susan, feeling desperate; "the truth must out. I can't keep the place better with one pair of arms. Mary Ann has long been gone, and master said it did not matter, so long as you were comfortable upstairs."

"That is it," thought Mrs. Ford; "that is it. Anything to keep me quiet up there."

"And you don't know, ma'am, what we have gone through downstairs," continued Susan, tears standing in her eyes as she spoke. "Short commons is nothing, I can do with them as well as any one; and the children, though they did not fare daintily, had enough—God bless them! But it was a fight for the dear life, one may say, everything going to rack and ruin, and one pair of arms for it all. When the servants went, I kept up with you about Mary Ann as long as I could; and Mr. Ford, he would make me take a charwoman, and she was a Mary Ann, so that did not go so much against my conscience. But lawk, ma'am, I could not have the heart to keep her; and to know, as I did, that master dined out day after day because there was nothing at home, or not more than enough for the children and me, and that Mary Ann. I soon packed her off, I did; and I feel, ma'am, as if I did well."

Susan ceased her explanation, and looked at her mistress half defiant, half imploring.

"Anything to keep me quiet, upstairs out of the way," muttered Mrs. Ford. "I see—I see."

She turned away, and once more ascended the staircase.

"Ay, do, ma'am," eagerly cried Susan; "it is enough for one day; do go to your own rooms again."

"Never!" replied her mistress. "Oh! God, help me! What have I been doing for these seven years? But it is not too late? I am strong. I am well now."

It was useless to contend with her; Mrs. Ford was bent on having her own way. Upstairs she went, to the room of her children. Her brows knit and her lips tightened, as she there witnessed new and more dreary tokens of pinching poverty, and long standing neglect.

"I know what you think, ma'am," said Susan, firing up; "but I know, too—I have done what I could, and it is not one pair of arms——"

"Hush!" interrupted her mistress, raising a warning hand; "whose step is that?"

"It is Miss Ford, ma'am," said Susan, opening the door, and thus giving Mrs. Ford a view of that lady on the landing.

Poor Miss Lavinia turned pale as death, and looked ready to faint on beholding her sister-in-law ; but one look convinced Mrs. Ford of her identity, and a second glance, more scrutinizing than the first, also convinced her that Miss Ford was not the mother of the child who now hung shrinkingly to her skirts.

"I am glad you are well again," at length stammered Miss Lavinia.

"Thank you," was Mrs. Ford's short answer. "Who is that child?" she added, pointing to Mab.

"God knows," faltered Miss Lavinia, "looking preciously guilty," as Susan internally phrased it. "John found her sitting on the door-steps, and took her in ; but why she was left at his door, he having already three boys of his own, is hard to say. Perhaps, though, that as the Fords are an old Catholic Lancashire family, that may be the reason ; for I questioned her last night, and made her say her prayers, and I found she had been reared a Catholic ; and I almost thought she had a Lancashire look, too."

Mrs. Ford smiled sternly, first at Miss Lavinia, in whom she saw her husband's accomplice ; then at the child, in which she beheld the fruit of his guilt, and saying, with bitter emphasis, "Ay, she *has* a Lancashire look," she walked downstairs, back to her own room.

"And now, ma'am, do pray rest," entreated Susan.

Mrs. Ford turned almost fiercely upon her.

"Rest!" she said ; "rest ! I shall sit at the head of the dinner-table this day."

"Very well, ma'am," said Susan, with a desperate sort of resignation ; "and what is there to be for dinner to-day?"

Mrs. Ford did not answer her ; she was walking up and down the room with restless excitement.

"I suppose the cold beef will do," muttered Susan, and, still amazed at the strange turn events had taken, she went downstairs.

It so chanced that Mr. Ford did not come in early that day, as was his habit ; but when he came he was in high spirits. The shares were rising with unexpected rapidity.

"I shall sell out next week," thought Mr. Ford, "and then—" "Then" referred to a new speculation, and one still more promising than the last, of which he had heard that very day. He was full of hope ; and, for the hundredth time in his life, sure of success, and, with success, of fortune.

"If dear Alicia would only go on improving," he thought, with a sigh, as he reached his own door, "all would be well."

Susan admitted him, with a countenance overflowing with news. His thoughts at once flew to the child.

"Where is she?—what have you done with her?" he asked, nervously.

"Bless me, sir, I ain't done anything!" rather sourly replied Susan, "and if missus will come down and dine to-day——"

"What!"

"If missus will come down and dine to-day," repeated Susan, "why, surely it is all for the best."

The rush of joy was too great. Mr. Ford turned pale as death, and was obliged to cling to Susan for support.

"Bear up, sir," said Susan, who was ready to cry herself—"bear up—there she is!"

Mr. Ford looked up; his wife was descending the staircase with a slow but steady step. A strange shadow of her former self looked Mrs. Ford. She had put on a dark silk dress, seven years old in fashion and taste. Everything in her attire, from her wide collar to her narrow sleeves, looked antiquated and faded; saddest of all looked her sad eyes and her pale, rigid face; but Mr. Ford was blind—blind with happiness and affection. Alicia was cured—Alicia was well again! He saw nothing else. He went to the foot of the staircase and took her in his arms.

"God bless you, Alicia!" he exclaimed, fervently. "God bless you, my darling!"

He kissed her again and again. Mrs. Ford gave him an icy look—a look that said "enough," but which Mr. Ford knew not how to read.

"Where are the boys?" exclaimed Mr. Ford, excitedly. "Susan, call the boys—tell them to come and see their mother. Where *are* the boys?"

"Better not worry her, sir," put in Susan.

"I shall see my children," coldly said Mrs. Ford, putting away her husband. With a steady step she entered the front parlour, where the cloth was laid, and the three boys and Mab were gathered in a corner, giggling and laughing.

"Boys," cried Mr. Ford, "here's your mother come back again. Bob, Ned, Bill, here's your mother come to dine with us, my boys!"

Profound silence followed this announcement. The three boys turned round and looked at their mother, but not even

Robert seemed inclined to approach her, and Mrs. Ford made no sign, held out no encouragement. Her love had never been one of words, and she was still too much the woman of seven solitary years to care for speech now. She looked at her children with silent tenderness, and shunned, with irresistible aversion, poor little Mab's fair face and golden hair; and that was all.

The hours which Mrs. Ford had spent upstairs since the morning had strengthened her secret resolve, and made it firm and inexorable as fate. She would not reproach her husband: she would not even be unkind to the child: she would not seem conscious of infidelity or wrong; but she would watch—watch and keep guard over *her* children. She would let no usurper step between them and their father. Whatever happened, *they* should be protected. Mrs. Ford's self-denial, however, did not go so far as to ignore Mab's presence in the house; and, turning calmly to her husband, she said, in her clearest tones:

"Why is this child here, Mr. Ford?"

How those five hundred pounds must have clung to Mr. Ford's soul to make him color up and stammer so!

"The child," he said, feeling, rather than meeting his wife's keen look; "you mean the little girl, I suppose."

Mrs. Ford bent her stately head, and her husband was going to stammer an awkward "After dinner, my dear," when an unexpected auxiliary came to the rescue. A loud double knock at the front door announced a visitor.

"Please, sir, Captain George wishes to say a few words to you," said Susan, putting in her head at the door.

"Show him in—show him in!" eagerly cried Mr. Ford. "You'll be glad to see Captain George, my dear. Captain George, come in, old fellow. Here's a ghost, Captain George!"

Captain George, who was indeed surprised, started back a little on perceiving Mrs. Ford, but, quickly recovering, he gracefully exclaimed,

"A lovely ghost, old fellow—a lovely ghost!"

"She could not do any longer without me," said Mr. Ford, rubbing his hands with boastful triumph; "could you, Ally? Sit down, Captain George, and have pot-luck with us."

"In honour of the happy event—I don't mind if I do," replied Captain George, taking a chair at the table with the most amiable alacrity. "But, bless my soul, if that is not little 'Never Mind!'"

"Yes," replied Mr. Ford, relieved, yet embarrassed to have

his wife thus indirectly answered, "it is the child we found yesterday on the doorsteps. I took her in, and I mean to keep her."

"Oh! I see, I see," nodded Captain George, with an air of sudden reserve; then looking at Mrs. Ford, next whom he sat, and in whose watchful eyes he perchance read something, he added, apologetically, "our friend here was always fond of children—always: besides, having no girls of his own, you know."

Mrs. Ford gave him a cold, fixed look; and Mr. Ford, carving the joint which, by some mysterious means, Susan had substituted for the cold beef, was going to help his guest, when his wife icily observed:

"You have not said grace, Mr. Ford."

Mr. Ford, most of whose gracious habits had vanished one after the other during the last seven years, blushed, and muttered an indistinct blessing.

With keen pain his wife saw the grin which stole from Robert to Bill, and from Bill to Ned—and which Captain George's demure looks nearly converted into an open laugh of derision; but she had nerved herself to bear much, and with as much composure and steadiness as if she had not long been a stranger to the sights of this every-day world, she did the honours of the dinner-table.

It was a strange meal, and a noisy one, thanks to Captain George. He made himself irresistibly amusing to the children, from Robert down to Mab; highly entertaining to Mr. Ford, disagreeable to his sister, and bitterly offensive to his wife. It seemed, indeed, to be his object to draw out all poor Mr. Ford's worst traits and greatest weaknesses. Mr. Ford, elated by the news he had heard in the city, had taken some refreshment on his way home. He reached Queen's Square excited but sober; but his joy at his wife's recovery, and Captain George's presence, rendered him strange and boisterous at dinner. He repeatedly drank the health of Mrs. Ford, and every time he uttered "Your health, my love," across the table, he winked at Captain George, and added, in an audible whisper, "Could not do without me, you see." And Captain George, who drank Mrs. Ford's health fully as often as her husband, and sometimes twice to his once, did his best to lead him on.

"Leave the table," said Mrs. Ford to her children, as she saw that her husband's self-possession was fast deserting him, "and go up-stairs," she added.

"Stay," shouted Mr. Ford; "Robert, drink your mother's health; Bill, take a glass, my boy. Ned, where are you?"

Mrs. Ford rose, pale with anger and sorrow. Captain George seemed to take pity on her, for he unexpectedly interfered.

"Nonsense," he said; "let boys be boys, and men be men. Come out with me; we have tired Mrs. Ford long enough: besides, I want to say a word to you on business."

"Oh! you want to do me, do you?" said Mr. Ford, with tipsy slyness; "*I* know you, Captain George—I know you—no go."

"No, no, now; 'pon honour, that's too bad," said Captain George; and whispering familiarly to Mrs. Ford, he added.

"Never mind, my dear lady; it is only for once, and I shall send him home to you in an hour."

And so he did; for they left the house together. Ay, Captain George kept his word. In an hour he sent Mr. Ford home in a cab—dead drunk.

CHAPTER IX.

SOME penitence and some shame Mr. Ford expressed the next morning. But on the whole he made light of the matter; and, half carelessly, half good-humouredly, he laid his transgressions to the joy he felt at seeing his wife once more downstairs. He assured her, however, that "Captain George had fished nothing out of him;" and the confusion he could not help betraying, sprang, not from having been brought home intoxicated, but from the recollection which had escaped his mind the preceding day, that Mrs. Ford must have found the house in a strange state of negligence and decay.

"You see, my dear," he said, as they sat down to breakfast, "matters are never quite right when the mistress of the house is ill as you were; but I have already ordered some new furniture—this is too shabby, carpets, sofas, and the rest of it: and I am almost sorry you came down so soon—I really am, my love."

He spoke with a warmth and tenderness that ought to have been convincing, but Mrs. Ford was watching Mab. The child had stolen into the room, where they breakfasted alone, and stood by Mr. Ford's chair looking shyly in his face, as if expecting a caress. He gave it kindly but mechanically, whilst his hand smoothed her golden curls he still addressed his wife:

"By the way, my dear," he said, "how do you like the harmonium?"

"Thank you, it is a good instrument," she said, aloud—and in her heart she thought, "It is his child."

Mr. Ford's face fell. Accustomed as he was to his wife's coldness, he had expected something more. But then poor Alicia could not know how hard a struggle it had been to get that instrument. She suspected nothing of Livy's thirty-five pounds; she did not know that, without Mab's five hundred, gloomy would have been the fate of the whole family. It was no fault of hers, only she did not know.

It was well Mr. Ford did not know what was passing in his wife's mind whilst he was stroking Mab's hair. Terrible is the jealousy that survives love. No tender regret, no fond remembrance, soften its bitterness and wrath. It is the offspring of self-love and pride, and, like them, it is implacable. Relentless dislike sprang up in Mrs. Ford's heart. She thought herself outraged in her dignity—in the sanctuary of women, home—in her children, ever loved though so long estranged. In that loving tenderness which had kept every care away from her, she read the cold design of a faithless heart. But she said, she showed nothing; neither her husband nor the child could tax her with unkindness, even in those first trying moments; yet it was well for Mr. Ford that he had little tact and blunt perceptions, that he neither saw nor minded his wife's strange coldness, and that he explained away her icy looks and her brief replies. It was well for him that the cruel blow was delayed, and fell not on him then. Poor fellow, he had but one thought, and that was, how he might best please his Idol.

"My love," said he, rising from the breakfast-table, and walking about the parlour, with his hands thrust in his trousers' pockets, "my love, if it does not fatigue your mind too much, will you just tell me what arrangements we had best make about this house, now that you are well and strong again."

Mrs. Ford received this offer with cold acquiescence. It was her due.

"Your circumstances do not seem very flourishing, Mr. Ford," she said, a little reproachfully; "I shall be satisfied if you take another servant and refurnish the house, which is, indeed, in a shameful state."

Mr. Ford always congratulated himself on the extraordinary presence of mind he displayed on this occasion. Instead of letting out the unpleasant truth that he had little or no ready

money just then, he brightened up, and said cheerfully, "Certainly, my dear, certainly ; but is that all ?"

"No, it is not all," replied Mrs. Ford, with some bitterness, "the children want clothes, Mr. Ford."

Mr. Ford brightened up.

"Certainly, my love ; but do you want nothing for yourself ?"

"Nothing."

"Don't you think, my dear, that a drive in the country, say Richmond, and a quiet luncheon at a quiet inn, would do you good ? Of course we should take Lavinia and the children."

Mrs. Ford shook her head, in token of denial.

"My dear, it is a beautiful day, mild and lovely ; we should have a close carriage."

He looked anxiously at his wife. She seemed languid and indifferent ; but Mr. Ford, convinced that the excursion would do her infinite good, persisted.

"As you please," she said, at length, and Mr. Ford, delighted to have won her acquiescence, immediately went to secure a close carriage for his wife and himself, and an open one for the children. But when the carriages came round, Mrs. Ford thought that Mr. Ford had better go with his sister and the young children, and let her and Robert go alone ; for though the close carriage was a large one, Mrs. Ford could not be crushed.

Mr. Ford did his best to brighten up at this arrangement, and he said, "Certainly, my dear," in his most cheerful tone ; but Mrs. Ford's choice depressed him for all that. So she went with her eldest son, and he and Miss Ford and the two younger boys and Mab crowded into the other carriage. The day was fine, and the drive was a pleasant one ; but when Richmond Park was reached, Mrs. Ford declined to alight ; she sent away Robert and drew down the green carriage blinds, refusing to look out, to Mr. Ford's great disappointment.

"Don't you think, my dear, the sight of the verdure would do you good ?" asked Mr. Ford.

"My head aches," answered Mrs. Ford, and, leaning back in the carriage, she closed her eyes.

Mr. Ford walked away rather disconsolately—it was a great pity that Alicia's head ached ; but perhaps the fresh air and the motion would do her good, so he went and ordered luncheon, leaving the children under the care of Miss Lavinia, whilst Mrs. Ford and her carriage drove slowly on.

"Why, bless me if that is not little 'Never Mind!'" cried a gay voice.

To her great annoyance, Miss Ford recognized Captain George. The gallant Captain was not alone; a stout lady was leaning on his arm, and she was looking at Mab with motherly interest.

"Is that the child?" she whispered, audibly.

"It is the child, my love," replied her husband.

"Sweet little thing!"

She beckoned in friendly wise, but Mab was too busy with Robert to heed her.

"What an extraordinary coincidence!" exclaimed Captain George. "You come to Richmond, and we come to Richmond. Is Ford here?"

Miss Ford stammered that her brother had gone to order luncheon, upon which Captain George discovered that the coincidence was not merely extraordinary, but delightful. Mrs. George had just been wishing to go and take luncheon somewhere, and nothing could be pleasanter to all parties than to take luncheon together. In the meanwhile, what could be more appropriate than to enjoy together, of course, the beauties of Richmond Park? Miss Lavinia timidly suggested that her brother would only order luncheon for six; but Captain George kindly assured her that what would do for six would do for eight, and again suggested that they should enjoy the beauties of Richmond Park. Seeing the hopelessness of her lot, Miss Lavinia submitted.

When Mr. Ford came back rather flushed and warm from his errand, he had some trouble in finding either his wife or his sister. At length he saw the carriage in an avenue, and in the distance he perceived a group, in which, on approaching it, he had the pleasure of recognising his friend, Captain George, who was playing at blind man's buff with the children.

"Didn't expect to find us here, old fellow," cried the Captain, pointing his cane at him; "and what about the luncheon? Soon ready—eh?"

Mr. Ford was the most hospitable of men. Appeal to his hospitality, and he lay bound hand and foot at your mercy. No sooner did Captain George speak of luncheon than the royal demesne of Richmond Park became Mr. Ford's own. An invisible roof spread above the heads of Captain and Mrs. George; and from intruders, they became sacred guests.

"Luncheon will be ready in an hour," cheerfully replied Mr.

Ford ; "perhaps I had better go and tell Alicia—she might just walk for a few minutes."

"My dear," said Captain George to his wife, "you will like to see Mrs. Ford."

Mrs. George would be delighted ; and though Mr. Ford knew well the meeting would be highly distasteful to his wife, he could not very well prevent Captain and Mrs. George from going up to her carriage. A queen could not have been more stately than was Mrs. Ford to Captain and Mrs. George ; she looked at them, and spoke to them with such regal coldness, that the interview did not last more than a few minutes. When they were gone, Mrs. Ford beckoned to her husband, who came up to her, looking foolish.

"Mr. Ford," she said, in a tone of ice, "are these people staying with you?"

"My dear, it is chance brought them here."

"I ask if they are staying with you."

"I believe they mean to do so."

Mrs. Ford shut her eyes, and said no more ; but when it was time to go to luncheon, she informed her husband that she could not eat, and would go back to town at once. In vain Mr. Ford entreated and remonstrated ; Mrs. Ford was inflexible, and Miss Lavinia, who was present at the debate, preferred a timid request to be allowed to go home with Mrs. Ford. By an extraordinary coincidence, as Captain George would have said, she, too, had a headache, and no appetite. With a rueful look, Mr. Ford saw the carriage drive away. The children were very happy, and he could hear them shouting with glee, and Captain and Mrs. George were charming company, no doubt ; but the trouble and the expense had been taken for Alicia, and Alicia had enjoyed nothing.

Captain George's declaration that a meal sufficient for six persons is also sufficient for eight, was thus falsified, since six persons alone remained to enjoy that which Mr. Ford had ordered. The departure of Mrs. Ford and Miss Lavinia in the close carriage wakened, however, very sincere regret in the bosom of Captain George—for they had come by rail, and Mrs. George would have preferred the close carriage to go home in.

"However, we will make the open one do," kindly added Captain George.

Now, Mr. Ford's carriage was not like the pavilions of Prince Ahmed, in the Arabian story, it could not expand according to the number of the persons it was to accommodate, and

Mr. Ford was startled at Captain George's suggestion; but again hospitality interfered, and Mr. Ford looked as cheerful as he could. To do Captain George justice, he made luncheon a merry meal. He told the children wonderful stories of his adventures in early life, and kept them in such glee that Mr. Ford's genial heart warmed towards the man. It did him good to see his boys in such spirits, and to hear little Mab's silvery laugh. And then when the meal was over, who so ingenious as Captain George? He took them all to the park, kindly leaving Mr. Ford to pay the reckoning—and whilst Mrs. George sat on the grass and rested, Captain George invented the most extraordinary and the funniest games for Mr. Ford's boys and Mab. Then, when it was really time to go, Captain George proved that he had been in the wars by the clever way in which he attempted to pack the carriage. Having first enthroned Mrs. George in the most comfortable seat, he did his best to find room for every one else, and would willingly have thrust the children under the seats to accomplish so praiseworthy an object, if the coachman had not put an end to his persevering efforts and his assurances of "there's room for us all," by peremptorily declaring that no earthly consideration should induce him to take more persons home than he had brought to Richmond.

"Never mind, old fellow," kindly said Captain George, "we can go home by rail. My love," he added, bidding his wife a graceful adieu, "mind you are put down at your own door. On no account let it be at the end of the terrace. It is no use letting those fellows off," continued Captain George, addressing Mr. Ford, as they walked away together to the station; "one pays just as much, you know—neither more nor less."

When Mr. Ford reached Queen Square, he found that his wife had gone to bed. She was very unwell, Miss Lavinia said. Wild with alarm, Mr. Ford ran for her medical man, who said it was only excitement, but scolded him roundly for having taken her out—and this was the end of Mr. Ford's day of pleasure.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. FORD kept her room a fortnight, and, during that time, her temper was so irritable, capricious, and unaccountable, that even Mr. Ford's patience was sorely tried. He knew dear Alicia could not help it, still it was hard. At length Mrs. Ford came

down one morning. She found the parlours in all the glow of new furniture; not that it was showy, Mr. Ford's taste in these matters had, at least, the merit of plainness—respectable neatness was his ideal; but the rooms were fresh papered, new carpeted, new curtained, and looked wonderfully improved. She found, too, a new servant, fresh and rosy, Lucy by name, and who had the additional merit of being Susan's young sister, and completely under Susan's dominion. She found, also, her children in neat and comfortable attire, and in excellent health; and to be a contented woman, Mrs. Ford only required to see things as they were. But Mrs. Ford saw things as they were not, and silently brooded over her wrongs.

She had not been up more than a few days, and the house was still under the management of Miss Lavinia—poor thing, she, too, brooded over her thirty-five pounds, not one of which had she seen again—when Susan, tapping at the drawing-room, informed her mistress that a strange lady wished to speak to her.

"Send her to Miss Ford," querulously replied Mrs. Ford: "she is one of Mr. Ford's friends, of course—send her to Miss Ford."

"She will not see Miss Ford, ma'am—she wants you."

"I wish Mr. Ford's friends would stay away," still querulously said Mrs. Ford. "I can see no one—who is she?"

"She would not give her name, ma'am; but she is a very strange lady, with such short petticoats, all tucked up so oddly!—and there is a little girl with her, too."

Mrs. Ford's thoughts flew to Mab. A little girl!—was it anything about the child!

She reddened, and said quickly,

"Show her in."

Susan had not time to obey. In walked a middle-aged lady, in widow's weeds, with iron-grey hair, straight, hard features, not without a sort of good-humour in them, and, as Susan had said, the shortest of short petticoats, accurately tucked up round her ankles.

There is a great deal in petticoats. Whilst they are worn they will have a meaning. This lady's were short, resolute, wilful, and strong-minded. Other women might object to showing their ankles, or take pleasure in sweeping the streets—she evidently would not soil the hem of her garment, and felt she could put forth a foot with anyone.

"Well," said the lady, "don't you know me, Alicia?"

She held out her hand, and a vision of a fresh-coloured, dark-

haired girl, who had gone out on her honeymoon to Australia, some twenty years before, with Alicia's brother, rose before Mrs. Ford. It was Thomasina Norton, her sister-in-law and cousin, who, though seven years a widow, still wore her weeds, and would wear them so long as she lived.

"Of course I am altered," said Mrs. Norton, sitting down, "and so are you," Licia. I heard you became a beauty, and married—not too well—but don't be afraid, I am not going to breathe a word against him. I know what it is to have had a husband—and I will kill any one who would dare to say a word against mine," impetuously added Mrs. Norton, rising as she spoke. Seven years had passed since Robert Norton had been laid in his grave at Melbourne, but the heart of his widow beat for him still, and tears stood in her eyes, and her lips quivered, as she vindicated him against possible aspersion.

"And where are your children?" she asked, looking round her, as if she expected the young Fords to be in their places like so many pieces of furniture.

"At school," answered Mrs. Ford. "Is this child yours?" she added, glancing down at a little girl of eight, who shyly hid behind Mrs. Norton's skirts; "but no, I remember—you have no children, Tom?"

"No, indeed," briefly answered Tom, for so Mrs. Norton's friends always called her; "No, indeed, I have none." And she uttered the declaration in a tone that implied that it was a doubtful proceeding to have children, and that she, for one, had kept clear of it.

"No, this is Harry's child," she continued. "You remember my brother Harry, 'Sly Harry,' as dear Robert used to call him. Well, Sly Harry he found him, and I never liked him since then; but my dearest husband was the most forgiving of men, and, as almost his last words were, 'Take the baby, Tom,' I took Nelly. Look up, child."

Nelly looked up; a dark, gipsy face, shaded by dark hair, was hers. A face of dreamy sweetness and some beauty, lit up with soft black eyes.

"She is like her father," said Mrs. Ford, slightly moved; for that father, now a widower in Australia, had been one of her rejected suitors.

"Yes, she is like Sly Harry," said Mrs. Norton, with significant emphasis; "but have you got a girl too?" she added, surprised, as Mab softly opening the door, timidly looked in, to deliver a message from Susan. "Come here, little one. Why,

she is not a bit like you," continued Mrs. Norton, looking up in her sister-in-law's face.

"She is not mine," was the icy reply. "Mr. Ford has adopted her."

Mrs. Norton whistled; gave Mab another scrutinizing look, and, saying to the two children, who were examining each other with shy, inquiring glances, "Go and play together—go and play," she dismissed them. They left the room hand in hand, and, ere the door had well closed upon them, Mrs. Ford said hurriedly, as if anxious to change the subject,

"Where are you?—why did you not come to stay with us?"

"I am in comfortable lodgings, my dear, where I am sure not to be in the way."

"Say we were too poor to receive you," rather bitterly said Mrs. Ford.

"Well, what about it?" stoutly rejoined Mrs. Norton; "it is no sin to be poor, that I know of; and if your husband is not a successful man, he is your husband, and you love him none the less. Oh! Alicia, don't talk of poverty to me—you have your husband still; and I, the rich woman—for I am rich—I envy you."

"You envy me!"

"Not your children, mind you! That little, sly, deceitful Nelly is the plague of my life. She looks soft and sweet; wait a bit; there will soon be a battle between her and that little grey-eyed thing. It is only with boys that Miss Nelly Norton agrees. Oh! she and her cousins will get on wonderfully, depend upon it!"

"They will be back for dinner," said Mrs. Ford. "Take off your bonnet, Tom, and stay with us."

But Tom thought she would like to keep on her bonnet, England was but a chill place. And what had Alicia been doing with herself all these years? for Tom's talk was more varied and fluent than connected.

"Nothing—nothing," drearily replied Alicia. "Imagine a long blank, and you have my whole history."

"A blank with three boys! But I heard you had become such a beauty. Your good looks are gone, then, Alicia—all gone."

"I dare say they are."

"I dare say there is no doubt about it. You know me of old; I contend it is no scandal to talk of a friend's face. My

sister-in-law, Mary, never would tolerate my saying that her son was plain. He is plain—can I help it? But she says it may prevent him from getting married. ‘Now, Mary, you know *that* is nonsense,’ said I, ‘James’s face is not a thing that either you or he can put in your pockets, and not bring out till the wedding day is over. It must be seen, do what you like, and so where’s the harm of saying the plain truth about it?’ Not but that there’s much in a face,” continued Mrs. Norton, after a short pause, “and in one’s whole person, too! Now, my dear husband could never endure tall women. He had not seen me since we were children, and he took it in his head that *I* was tall. ‘Not a bit,’ said his aunt, ‘Tom is neither tall nor short. She is of a nice middle height, just the wife *you* want. She is like her father, but hers is a refined and feminine resemblance, of course.’ In short——”

A piercing childish scream here interrupted Mrs. Norton. She seemed at no loss to understand from whom it proceeded, for she said, very calmly, in answer to Mrs. Ford’s startled look:

“I told you so; Nelly has pinched or bitten that little fair thing; bless you, it is her way. Well, grey-eyes, what has she done to you?” she added, opening the door, and questioning Mab, who sat on the staircase, flushed and crying, whilst Nelly stood, silent and cool, in a corner of the landing.

“She bit me,” sobbed Mab.

“Of course she did. I know her. Nelly, come in here, and sit down on that chair.”

“We will go down-stairs, if you please,” said Mrs. Ford, rising; “I hear Mr. Ford’s voice below.”

And, without heeding Mab, who remained crying on the staircase, Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Norton went down, followed by the demure-looking Nelly.

Mr. Ford was below, and as he and his wife’s sister-in-law had never met, this, their first interview, was awkward, though cordial. Mr. Ford was excited, and Mrs. Norton observant; there was that about him that did not please her—indeed it required his quality of a husband to soften her severe appreciation of some of his evident deficiencies. Very restless was Mr. Ford, talking at random, and rolling some money that lay loose in his pockets, and seemed to trouble him.

“Just come from Australia, ma’am—a fine country—a fine country; where is the child? Livy, where is she?”

Miss Lavinia, who was sewing unheeded in a corner of the parlour, rose and said, “I shall go and look for her.”

"My sister, Miss Ford,—Mrs. Norton—I am anxious about the child, Alicia—she always comes to welcome me—where can she be?"

"She is sitting on the staircase crying," coldly said Mrs. Ford; "she and Nelly quarrelled, I believe."

"Oh! ah! bad as boys, eh!—a fine place Sydney is, ma'am."

"I come from Melbourne," said Mrs. Norton.

"True—a fine place Melbourne—a rising country—gold diggings and all."

"The diggings are not the best part of the country," shortly said Mrs. Norton, still eyeing Mr. Ford with an observant air.

"What is the matter, Alicia?" he exclaimed, seeing his wife, who stood by the window, give a sudden start. Before she could answer, he looked out; a handsome carriage had rattled to the door, a footman had given a loud double knock, and Captain George had stepped out and entered the house, to be almost immediately ushered into the parlour by Susan.

Captain George was very much altered. His jaunty air had given place to a grave and demure aspect, even as his gay apparel had been replaced by the deepest mourning. Mr. Ford stared at him in mute amazement, and Captain George stared at Mrs. Norton, who looked at him with cool defiance; but this was soon over, and, turning to Mr. Ford, Captain George said, with much gravity:

"I see you are shocked—I have indeed lost a valued relative, a maiden cousin on my mother's side."

"Did she leave you that handsome set-out?" ironically asked Mr. Ford, nodding towards the carriage.

A sly gleam of satisfaction twinkled in Captain George's brown eyes, but it was quickly repressed.

"She did," he demurely replied; "that is to say, the bulk of her property was divided between my brother and myself, for she made no will. She was taken off with a suddenness which ought to be a warning to us all to be duly prepared."

Captain George drew on his gloves thoughtfully and sadly, as he spoke, then trying to smile,

"I am getting old and moralizing, I think," he said; but life is a riddle—a riddle."

Captain George shook his head slowly, then relapsed into the good-humoured mood on seeing Mab led in by Miss Ford, and greeted her with a "How do you do, little 'Never Mind?'"

"My name is not 'Never Mind.'"

"And so you are a rich man now," said Mr. Ford, with ill-disguised envy.

"Not exactly—not exactly," correctively replied Captain George; "my share was but small—say something between ten and twenty," he added, knowingly, laying his finger to his nose; "but bless me, I was forgetting that doll I promised the other day! What do you say to it, little 'Never Mind'—bless me, I forget again, that is not the name. What is the name?"

"Oh! let me have the doll, let me have it!" cried Mab, forgetting her resentment.

"Certainly, I always gratify a lady's wishes," graciously replied Captain George—"always."

He tapped at the window; the footman at once answered the signal, and in a few seconds appeared, carrying a square deal box, which was respectfully placed before Mab, and whence she drew forth a very handsome doll, that nearly sent her wild with joy. Captain George, after looking at her benevolently, once more directed his discourse to the grown-up persons present.

"I think, madam," said he, addressing Mrs. Norton, "that I have already had the pleasure of meeting you."

Mrs. Norton put her hands behind her back, and replied that perhaps he had.

"I believe," continued Captain George, "that I had even the happiness of being of some trifling service to you."

Mrs. Norton smiled sternly, and doubted it.

"Excuse me," resumed Captain George, "I was a witness in your favour—but I should not have mentioned it; a sad case—a sad case, but men will be wretches, and not value their own happiness."

Mrs. Norton glared at him, and requested to know his meaning.

"Nay—nay," said Captain George, "not for worlds, since the subject is distasteful. Besides, he is dead and gone—it is amiable and feminine to forgive."

"Do you mean to say, sir—" cried Mrs. Norton, at the pitch of her voice.

"I mean nothing, my dear madam, nothing," hastily replied Captain George. "Ford, old fellow, a few words with you, eh!"

And before Mrs. Norton could recover her amazement, Captain George had stepped into the back parlour with Mr. Ford, and the door had closed upon them.

"I never knew anything like it, never!" said Mrs. Norton;

"that mean upstart, to dare and breathe a word against my dearest husband! But he shall not get out of it, Alicia, he shall not. As if he did not know me all along! Why, the moment he entered the room he knew me, as I knew him. You shall have a bit of my mind, Captain George—a bit of my mind."

And Mrs. Norton, once more quite cool, put her back to the front parlour door, and stood there, pleasantly waiting for Captain George.

She waited some time. His conference with Mr. Ford related to sundry money matters, which Captain George, now grown grand, requested Mr. Ford to transact for him. When this was over and settled, Captain George suddenly exclaimed:

"By the way, Mrs. George is very anxious to see little Never Mind before we leave; we are going to Italy for her health; can you spare me the child for an hour?"

Mr. Ford hesitated, but said, "Yes."

"Don't be afraid, sly-boots," facetiously said Captain George; "I don't want to find out anything."

"But will she go?" hurriedly asked Mr. Ford.

"To the world's end, if I hold out vistas of other dolls; but call her in and try her."

Mr. Ford opened the door that led into the front parlour, and called Mab. Captain George's request was preferred to the child, and his hint of more dolls produced the readiest acquiescence.

"Then we shall go at once," said Captain George; "and I think I shall slip out here," he added, opening the door that led to the hall—"that lady in the weeds and grey hair looked rather savage. Tell her, my dear fellow, it is a case of mistaken identity—mistaken identity," continued Captain George, with his old impudent wink.

And leading Mab by the hand, he coolly walked out past the front parlour door, and stepped into his carriage. Mr. Ford handed Mab in to him; and Captain George, wrapping her up in a loose warm shawl, clapped the door to, and uttered the magic "all right." The coachman at once drove away, and thus was Mrs. Norton defrauded of her vengeance. She had, however, the satisfaction—a great one, no doubt—of seeing Captain George kiss his hand to her from the carriage window, ere it drove away.

"Wait a while, wait a while," said the exasperated lady; "I shall be up to you yet, Captain George."

But we do not wish to raise false expectations; let us

declare it plainly: Mrs. Norton never was up to Captain George.

"Well, my dear," said Captain George, to Mab: "how do you like going to see the lady?"

"Is she pretty?"

"She has been pretty; but has and is are different, eh, little Never Mind? Besides, you saw her at Richmond. Give me a kiss."

A decided refusal was returned to this presumptuous request. Very good-humouredly did Captain George bear with his repulse, and with equal good humour did he go on bantering his young friend, as he called her, until the carriage reached number seven, Woodbine Terrace, Brompton. Mab, still wrapped in the shawl, was carried into the villa; it was a furnished one, and bore but few tokens of the next day's journey. She was conveyed at once to the presence of Mrs. George, just taking her tea in the parlour.

"I had given you up, my love," she said, pleasantly; "how do you do, my little dear?"

"Come, little Never Mind, go to the lady. I was detained, my dear—otherwise you know I would not keep you waiting."

"No, my dear, I am sure you would not. Sit by me, my love; what is your name? I have forgotten it."

"Mab, Mab Winter, now."

Mrs. and Captain George exchanged a look.

"His mother's name," said the Captain, pouring himself out some tea; "a clear case."

Mrs. George nodded, and helped Mab to some cake. But Mab did not care to eat. She was sorry she had come, and said so.

"I want Robert," she said, tearfully.

"Hush!" replied Mrs. George, "I have got something for you—look."

She put her hand in her pocket, and drew forth a coral necklace. Mab blushed with pleasure, and allowed the Captain to fasten it around her neck; then stealing a sly look at the looking-glass, she nodded at herself, and went on very pleasantly with her tea. But when it was over, the longing for home returned, and was once more expressed.

"Nonsense," said Captain George, "we have not done with you yet. Wait till the tea-things are cleared away—that is all, I say."

Mab waited, and magical indeed was the sight that rewarded

her patience. The tea-tray was replaced by Noah's Ark, and a wonderful collection of strange looking animals, who strayed to the further ends of the table. Exclamations of wonder and delight burst from her every time a new one appeared, and Mrs. George smiled, and Captain George rubbed his hands with glee.

"Capital! eh?" he exclaimed every now and then—"capital!"

They were all very much absorbed. A gentleman entered the room, and by Mab, at least, he was not heeded. Captain George saw him, indeed, gave him a nod, and said, "Take a chair, James," and there ended his welcome; and Mrs. George never moved, and smiled, but rather coldly.

This gentleman—a tall, grey man—was Captain George's younger brother, Mr. James George, a city man, and a rich man, too, if report spoke truly, and certainly a very different man from the gay Captain, in external appearance. Respectability and decorum were stamped on his whole person, and his deep mourning added to the solemnity of his aspect. He took his chair in profound silence, played for a while with his watch-guard, and looked at Mab.

"Some tea?" suggested Captain George.

"None, thank you. Who is that child?"

Here Mab looked up, and fixed her large grey eyes full upon him.

"Miss Mab Winter is her name," said the Captain, looking very much inclined to laugh.

"Winter!" musingly repeated Mr. George. "Anything to the Fords?"

Captain George threw himself back in his chair, and laughed outright.

"Oh! James—James!" he exclaimed, as soon as he recovered his breath. James looked at his brother with austere surprise.

"I am at a loss to divine the cause of your merriment," he said, in solemn displeasure. "I said, 'Anything to the Fords,' a natural question, and I repeat it, 'Anything to the Fords?'"

Captain George looked amazingly tickled, but did not laugh—his younger brother had always ruled him; he now said, gravely enough:

"Poor little Mab was left at Ford's door—Heaven knows by whom—and he took her in, and gave her his mother's name."

"Bless me, what an extraordinary story!" exclaimed Mr. George, arching his eye-brows; "and he gave her his mother's name, too—quite peculiar!"

"Very," drily said Captain George.

"And where were you before you were taken to Queen Square?" said Mr. George, addressing Mab, rather suddenly.

The child had never ceased looking at him, like one fascinated or perplexed.

Mr. James George was a peculiar, and not a pleasant-looking man, when you examined him closely. His small grey eyes, veiled by heavy drooping lids, had a sly and eager meaning. There was will in the lines of the thin mouth, and fearfulness in the long retreating chin, and, over all, a smoothness, tempered by dignity, which did well enough for superficial observers, but could avail nothing against the instinct of childhood. Instead of answering his question, Mab continued looking at him with all her might. He seemed annoyed, and, raising his voice, said again,

"Child, where were you before you were taken to Mr. Ford's house? With whom were you?"

"I don't know," said Mab, a little crossly.

"You must have been somewhere—where was it?"

"I don't know—there!"

"With whom were you?—with your father or your mother?"

Mab shook her head.

"I was with Mary and the lady—I wish I were at home with Robert," she querulously added.

"In what sort of a house did Mary live?" persisted Mr. George—"was there a door to it?"

"No."

"No!"

"No, it was a gate."

Mr. George looked slightly disconcerted, but resumed his cross-examination.

"A house with a gate—and—a garden?"

"Oh! yes—a large garden—a park!"

"A park—hem!—and in what county?"

Mab was silent.

Mr. George suggested Derbyshire, then Buckinghamshire, then every English, Scotch, and Irish county, patiently enumerating the name of each, but all fell idly on Mab's ear, no token of recognition crossed her face as she heard him. Not much more successful was he when he required a personal description of Mary or of the lady. Mary had red hair, and the lady wore glasses, and that was all Mab knew or could tell.

"A hopeless case," said Mr. George, with every appearance

of disgust; "and a very low-born child, I suspect. I am surprised," he added, turning to his brother, "you have her here. I have a strong impression that she was taken from a workhouse, and dropped at Queen Square. Observe, she speaks of a gate—workhouses have gates; then of a large garden, which she is pleased to call a park—the very thing; the lady probably is the matron; and Mary—Mary, most likely her mother. That," added Mr. George, rising, and putting on his gloves, "is my opinion of the case—my dispassionate opinion. But it is not much use in giving it," he added, glancing at the table covered with the tenants of Noah's Ark. "You have, as usual, been making a fool of yourself, and my clear-sightedness and advice are both disregarded. Let it be—let it be. Good evening, Mrs. George."

Captain George threw himself back in his chair and stared at his brother like one amazed.

"Now, James——" he began.

"I think you had better not," rather pompously interrupted his brother—"I think you had better not, Captain George."

"Hang it!—I had forgotten all about you, James—I had, upon my word," exclaimed Captain George, striking his fist on the table; then suddenly changing his mood, he shook his forefinger roguishly at his relative, and winked most knowingly. "Didn't know you, old fellow—didn't know you—know you now, though. It was a deep one—it was."

Mr. James George looked unable to speak. He had known his brother for some years, as he would have said himself; but never had the Captain taken the liberty of calling him old fellow before—never.

"Mrs. George," he cried, more amazed than offended, "can you explain—*can* you explain this most extraordinary behaviour?"

Mrs. George glanced reproachfully at her husband, who compelled himself to look grave, and declaring there was nothing to explain, rose to let his brother out; but no sooner were they in the hall together, than he broke again into a chuckling "Didn't know you, 'pon my word, didn't know you, James."

"I protest I cannot understand," said Mr. James, looking very indignant.

"Of course not," replied Captain George, with infinite amusement in his tone; "it cannot understand. Ah! it was a sly old fox—it was. Ta-ta—no use looking daggers at me."

It was no use, and so Mr. James George probably felt, for

though he did look daggers, he said not one word, and walked out of number seven, Woodbine Terrace, a dignified and sullen-looking man.

Captain George was still chuckling when he returned to the parlour. Mrs. George looked very ready to drop into a doze, and Mab, wearied and offended at Mr. George's questions and remarks, was looking dispiritedly at Noah's Ark.

"I want to go home," she said.

"I think you had better take her home," suggested Mrs. George, rousing herself up.

"Wilson can drive her home," replied Captain George, stretching himself lazily on a sofa, "she will be quite safe in the carriage."

Mrs. George seemed to think so too. Accordingly Mab was once more wrapped up in the shawl, placed in the carriage with the box that held Noah's Ark under her feet, an arrangement which Captain George roused himself to superintend; and after having consented to give that gentleman a parting kiss, she was driven back to Queen Square. She was fast asleep when the carriage stopped at Mr. Ford's door. That gentleman came out himself for her, and expressed his dissatisfaction, at the unceremonious manner in which Mab had been returned to him. It was as well that his wife did not hear him, nor see his knitted brows, but she was in her room. Mrs. Norton and Nelly had been gone some time, and Miss Lavinia, who sat sewing, and the three boys, who were deep in their books in the parlour, alone witnessed Mab's return.

"Why, the child might have got her death of cold," grumbled Mr. Ford, as he brought her into the warm room; "sit down by the fire, Mab; she is quite numb, I declare. Well, what do you want now?"

"Noah's Ark, please; it is in the carriage."

Susan was bringing it in, and Noah's Ark, on being set on the table, elicited exclamations of wonder and delight, in which even the grave Robert joined.

"That must be an expensive toy," said Miss Lavinia, putting down her work.

"I dare say it is; why, what red thing is that round your neck?"

"A coral necklace," promptly replied Mab; "Mrs. George says I am to keep it."

The coral necklace disturbed some conjectures Miss Lavinia had already been forming concerning Mab's parentage, and in

which Captain George figured. No, it could not be that; Captain George would not take her to show her to his wife.

"Nelly has got a coral necklace," said Robert. "Oh! Mab, what a pity you did not see Nelly—she is so pretty."

"And so good-natured," said Edward.

"She kissed me," put in William.

"No, she didn't."

"She did."

"Hush!" said Robert, checking a quarrel which this new Helen was going to cause between the two brothers; "Mab will see Nell to-morrow—she told me she would come."

"I have seen her," cried Mab, with flushed cheeks, "and I don't like her—she is spiteful, and she bit me."

"And I am sure Nelly is too amiable to bite," decisively said Robert, "I cannot believe it of her."

Mab's eyes filled with jealous and resentful tears, but she said nothing.

"She will bring Frederick, her brother," said William; "I like Frederick."

"You have never seen him," sharply said Robert.

"No matter—I like him."

"So do I," quickly put in Mab, "I like Frederick, and I shall shew him my Noah's Ark, and my doll," she added, looking around for it.

Alas! for the sight that met her view. The doll lay with her face to the floor, a shattered and disfigured image of the former self. Mab uttered a cry, then burst into tears.

"It was you did that," said Robert, reproachfully, to William. But both William and Ned denied the charge,—no, it was Nell—Nell who had deliberately taken the doll, and smashed it.

"Never mind, Mab—it is only a doll," loftily said Robert.

But Mab did mind, and, for the first time since her arrival in Queen Square, she went weeping to bed.

CHAPTER XI.

WELL it is for childhood that its griefs are short-lived, but better it would be if its dislikes were as brief. Mab was by no means of a resentful nature, yet the injured doll rankled in her mind, and she disliked Nelly from that evening. With Nell's brother Frederick, a fine good-humoured lad of ten, Mab, on

the contrary, formed a close friendship, so close, indeed as to excite some jealousy in Robert. Yet he had no cause. For Robert, her teacher, friend, and future husband, Mab had from the first day of their acquaintance contracted a reverential affection, and the rest of her favours she distributed pretty equally between his younger brothers and Frederick Norton.

No one meddled with the children. Miss Lavinia avoided them by temperament, Mr. Ford was always out, Mrs. Ford thought but of her own boys, and heeded neither the likes nor the dislikes of Mab; and Mrs. Norton sarcastically called Nell a flirt and Frederick a simpleton, and when she watched the ways of these six children, did so purely and simply for her own entertainment, and by no means for their improvement.

Quarrels were frequent in that little world, and as a rule these dissensions, however they might begin, ended with Robert and Nell on one side, and Mab and Frederick on the other. Ned and William either remained neutral, or they sided, partly through affection, more through fear, with their elder brother. But Frederick was sent to a school in the north, and Mab remained undefended. These were hard days for the child, for Robert, always so kind when they were alone, grew severe, despotic, and harsh when Nell was present. Nell knew how to flatter him, and, better still, how to work on his weakness. With a smile and a "I know you are afraid of Mab," or again, "You dare not hurt Mab's feelings," she could make Robert as unkind and as unjust as she pleased, or, what came to the same thing in Mab's opinion, she could secure impunity for her insults or her ill-nature, both of which Mab had to bear, although Robert was present. These attacks were more persevering than varied. Childhood is not generous, and Nell's taunts had Mab's unknown birth for their chief object. She had found that this was the surest sting, for Mab was pretty and clever; she cared little about her clothes, but she did care when she was told that she was a foundling, and that she lived upon charity. Sometimes she tried to retaliate, but Nell was cool and never lost her temper, and Mab could not keep hers long enough to vex the enemy—besides, what could she taunt Nell with? Nell had relatives and friends; Nell wore fine garments, and was rich; Nell was pretty, too, and if she was not so intelligent as Mab, she knew more than Mab did.

On a bright afternoon, the long contest between her and Nelly came to an end. The final scene was not very different from those that had preceded it, but it was rather more bitter.

Robert was, as usual, the real motive, though neither Mab nor Nelly mentioned his name. Mab wanted him to play with her, and Nelly did her best to prevent him; and while he suspended his decision, the war of words went on.

"You are only a foundling," said Nelly, curling her pretty lip at Mab.

Mab shook with emotion, but did not answer.

"I heard aunt saying that she supposed your birth was a disgrace—and aunt would not say it if it were not true."

Shame, pride, and passion contended in Mab's heart. She looked at Robert—she thought, she hoped he would defend her from an insult so flagrant and uncalled for; but Nelly looked very pretty in her bright blue silk dress, and she always stood high in Robert's good graces. He looked a little superciliously at the two young beauties who were contending for his favour, and he forbore to interfere. Mab's heart felt as if it would break. She was alone, insulted and unprotected.

"*He* would have taken my part," she cried, pale with anger, and scarcely refraining from tears; "and I hate you, Robert, and I will leave the house, I will."

"Do," said Robert, austere—"we do not want haters here."

"And never come back," added Nelly; "Come here, Robert, I want to show you something," and she drew Robert into a corner with an affectation of mystery.

That corner irritated Mab more than anything else. Who and what was Nelly that she should take Robert aside, and laugh and talk with him, to Mab's exclusion?

"I will run away," she thought—"I will!"

She looked out of the front parlour window. The sun shone on the green of the trees in the square; the world looked bright and inviting; Robert and Nelly, after discussing in their corner, had gone to the garden without minding her. There was nothing and no one to oppose her project. Mab stole out of the room, and opened the front door. The square was silent and lonely, yet the child stood irresolute on the threshold of that home, which, though it was turning so unkind, was still home. She paused like a young bird on the edge of its nest—then remembering that she had said she would do it, she went down the steps, and entered the square. At first she walked irresolutely around the iron railings, then coming to the gate and finding it ajar, she pushed it open and entered. There was no one within the enclosure; she was alone with the trees and the golden sun-

shine, and the discoloured statue of queen Anne. She sat down on the earth at the foot of the pedestal, and looked before her with sadness and discontent. She felt very forlorn. No one had minded her flight, and, as time passed, no one, it seemed, had missed her. Why was it so? Why was she not like Nelly, and Robert, and his brothers—precious and beloved?

Her poor little childish mind struggled in vain to find a ray of light in that strange mist. There came flashes of memory to her, of a kind lady, and a wild seashore, of a dark youth; but even to herself she could give those images no definite form. They were all gone, all gone, and had long been so. The memory of the latter days only showed her another lady, a large house, and Mary. Then came Queen Square and the present.

Her head ached with all these thoughts. She felt unhappy too, and cried silently and bitterly. She no longer cared to wander, but neither did she care to return to the house. She was satisfied to stay where she was, weeping and feeling chill and miserable.

The red light of the setting sun was fading away from the old brick houses of the square, the hands on the church dial marked five, the leaves no longer looked golden—they hung withered and thin on every bough, the blue sky had turned grey and a cold breeze shook the shivering branches above the child's head.

"I wish I were dead!" sobbed Mab, "I wish I were dead!"

She took her little skirt and gathered it over her head, she hid her face in her lap; for she began to feel afraid, twilight was creeping around her, and there were strange whisperings in the air. She did not see grey clouds gathering in the autumn sky, she did not feel at once the chill and penetrating rain, and when she felt it she did not stir. The passive despair of childhood had entered her heart. She stayed there wet and shivering.

It showed of how little account Mab was in the house that she was not missed though so long absent. Neither Robert nor Nell troubled themselves about her, and when Miss Lavinia, perceiving that she was not below, as usual, inquired where she was, Susan, with whom Mab was no favourite, replied sharply—

"Oh! the little monkey is sulking somewhere," and no more was thought or said on the subject.

Mr. Ford came home early, and he missed Mab at once.

"Where's the child?" he asked, looking round.

But no one could tell him where Mab was. The house was

searched for her and searched in vain. Robert and even Nelly got frightened. Mr. Ford detected the conscious looks they exchanged.

"What is it?" he asked; "what do you know about her?"

"She said she would run away," reluctantly answered Robert.

"Run away! What for?"

This time Mr. Ford got no answer.

At length the truth, or part of the truth was wrung from the two children, and it became evident that Mab had kept her word, and had run away.

But where could the child, a stranger to London, have gone?

Sorely troubled, Mr. Ford went forth into the square and called out aloud. He got no reply. It struck him that Mab might be within the enclosure. He looked and caught sight of some black object at the foot of the statue.

"Mab," he said, "Mab, are you there?"

A sob was Mab's only answer.

"She got shut in," was Mr. Ford's first thought, but the open gate proved it erroneous. He entered, went up to the child, and picked her up from the damp earth; with concern he saw that she was wet through, and he felt that she trembled violently.

Mr. Ford carried her to the house, and at once called Susan with imperative tones.

"Undress her and put her to bed," he said, "whilst I go for Doctor Smithson."

Susan obeyed. Mab was carried upstairs, undressed, and put into her little cot.

"I am afraid the child is really ill," said Miss Lavinia, with concern; "do look at her, Susan. She is quite flushed, and her hands are burning."

"The mischievous little monkey to go and get wet," crossly answered Susan.

"I will run away!—I will not be called a foundling!" moaned little Mab, in her delirium.

"Had we not better go and tell Mrs. Ford?" timidly suggested Miss Lavinia, looking at Susan.

Susan returned the gaze.

"I think, ma'am," she said emphatically, "we both know and can see Mrs. Ford don't dote on her; besides, she could come if she pleased, and if she do not please, whose business is it save her own?"

"Very true," murmured Miss Lavinia.

By this Mr. Ford returned, not with Dr. Smithson, whom he had not found, but with a strange medical man, whom, in his anxiety for Mab, he had gone for. The doctor looked at the child, felt her pulse, said it was a doubtful case, and withdrew with the intimation that he would call again the next morning.

"I must go to my work," stoutly said Susan, walking down stairs.

"I think I had better keep Robert and the boys away, for fear it should be a contagious fever," suggested Miss Lavinia.

"Very well," answered her brother; "I shall mind the child—only tell Alicia I am with her, and not to sit up for me."

He sat down by her little bed. He nursed her through that long night of fever. It was not love, it was not kindness, it was the secret though unacknowledged sting of conscience. She who had brought prosperity to his home, had been driven from it with insult. They had taxed her with being a foundling, with living on his charity, and he knew, in his heart of hearts, what would have become of him and of them, but for her!

As dawn broke in the sky, Mab ceased to moan, and fell asleep.

It was then the door opened, and that Mr. Ford, looking round, saw his wife standing on the threshold. She, too, had come, but it was not out of kindness to the child, it was because she felt that she should find him there. She felt sure, only she wanted to see it.

"Mr. Ford," she said, "had you not better go to bed?"

"Thank you, my love, but I do not like to leave the child."

"Why not?—she is asleep?"

"She might waken."

Mrs. Ford smiled bitterly. What more could he have done—she would not say for his own child, Mab was his—but for her children? She looked at the little face, now pale and weary, lying on its white pillow, then she raised her eyes to Mr. Ford's, wearied with watching, and, with another bitter smile, she withdrew. He felt vaguely uneasy at her manner. Alicia looked odd, but it was very kind of her to come in and look at him. "She always was so fond of me," he internally exclaimed. "The dear creature, to get up, and come and look at me—just like her!"

Mab's fever had left her the next morning. The medical man pronounced her safe, but recommended rest and seclusion. On the fourth day, however, Robert was admitted to her presence.

She would not look at him.

"Mab, don't you know me?" he asked.

Mab buried her face in her pillow, and Robert tried to kiss her, but she pushed him away.

"Go and kiss Nelly," she said.

"Nelly is gone, simpleton. Gone to such a grand boarding school."

The intelligence softened Mab, she turned her face to Robert, received his kiss, but, as she returned it, she said, impetuously,

"Robert, if you ever let me be called a foundling again——"

"Hush, ninny," he interrupted, "don't you know I am to marry you."

Thus was made up this quarrel, which had given Mab five days' illness, Mr. Ford some fatigue, expense, and anxiety, and which, besides hastening Mrs. Norton's resolve of sending Nelly to school, had given a keener pang to Mrs. Ford's aching heart.

CHAPTER XII.

Mrs. Ford now bent her mind on one object—Mab must leave the house, and go to school. She did not delay in mentioning this plan to her husband, though she felt convinced he would oppose it. She was deceived, his acquiescence was ready and cheerful.

"Of course," he said. "Of course, Alicia, you are quite right. Boys are not fit society for a girl. She will be much better at school."

But Mrs. Ford's scheme received unexpected opposition from Mab herself.

"I will not go to school," she said; "I will not."

Mr. Ford argued, menaced, and entreated. Mab heard him with silent tears—a school for her was a collection of Nellies, all taunting, all insulting her, all calling her foundling—and all she said, when he ceased speaking, was,

"Do not turn me out—do not."

Mr. Ford was much affected, and, as to all he said, this was Mab's invariable reply, he gave up the point in despair.

"I cannot, my dear," he said, "Providence sent the child to my door—I cannot turn her out, as she says. We must wait till she is older."

Mrs. Ford was extremely indignant at Providence being thus brought in, but with the inward reflection, "I must be insulted

to the last, and to the last I must bear it," she submitted. Now there was a person who visited at Queen Square, and who thought that the "last" was not far off. This was Mrs. Norton, and, as she was a zealous advocate for putting people on their guard, she managed to get Mr. Ford alone, and plainly told him that his wife was going wrong.

"Going wrong!" exclaimed Mr. Ford, pausing with his hand on the door as he was in the act of leaving the room; "not a bit of it. Alicia was never better in her life."

"I tell you Alicia is going wrong," persisted Mrs. Norton.

"How do you know?" was the sharp rejoinder.

"Why, she has such a colour for one thing."

Mr. Ford smiled derisively.

"And then she stoops so, that it is quite frightful."

"Pooh! she has left off stays, I suppose."

"Stays!" exclaimed Mrs. Norton very indignantly; "what have stays to do with stooping? Look at me," she added, throwing open her shawl and grasping her waist in both hands, she turned around to display its straightness to Mr. Ford's view, "do I wear stays? And look at me! Why, stays ruin the figures of women. Nelly shall never wear stays while she is with me. Of all fatal and pernicious inventions stays and boots are the worst. Oh! you may look at my feet. I wear shoes, sir, and only wish I had the moral courage to wear soles, the only sensible plan that ever was adopted; but boots you shall never see on my feet, unless they put them on me when I am dead."

Atoning for her want of moral courage by the firmness of this declaration, Mrs. Norton sat down and no more was said about Alicia's health; but the warning had not been thrown away on Mr. Ford. The very next day he called in Dr. Smithson, his wife's medical attendant, and waylaid him as he was leaving the Square, after seeing Mrs. Ford.

"Well," he said anxiously.

"Well," dubiously replied Dr. Smithson, "I do not like this change. I fear Mrs. Ford is worse."

"Worse! Why, Doctor, she does now what she has not done for years. Goes about, bears the light, does not mind talking, and sees to the house concerns."

"I know it—but that is just what alarms me—for it is only the result of some strong shock to the nervous system."

"Not at all," confidently replied Mr. Ford; "I am in perfect health, and nothing but uneasiness on my account could

give Mrs. Ford a shock sufficiently strong to account for your suggestion. Mrs. Ford idolizes me, sir, rejected splendid offers for my sake, and even her children, though her love for them is assuredly great, only occupy the second place in her affections."

Dr. Smithson smiled gravely, but said again,

"Allow me to assure you that Mrs. Ford is by no means cured."

With this he took his leave.

Mr. Ford was staggered, but only for a moment.

"I dare say I know as much about her case as any medical man," he thought, with that secret complacency which never forsook him, "of course I do. What is medicine? Observation, and I am essentially an observant man. I have no particular merit in being so, it is my nature, my bent—I cannot help it. Now, I have observed Mrs. Ford very closely all these years that she has been ill, and I have never seen her as she is now. If she had received a shock, should I not have detected it at once? Of course I should."

Although Mr. Ford came to this satisfactory conclusion, and went off to the city in high spirits—for, to use his own words, "matters were going on splendidly"—Mrs. Norton still felt convinced that Alicia was going wrong, and kindly attempted to lecture her into going right.

Now it so happened that Mrs. Ford had very little liking for her brother's widow. She had been honoured and indulged and obeyed for seven years, and could not tolerate the abrupt manners of Mrs. Norton, who was indeed the last person to humour, indulge, and obey any one, having probably bestowed all she had to spare in these matters on her deceased husband.

When she called, therefore, on Mrs. Ford a quarter of an hour after Dr. Smithson's departure, and found that lady alone in the drawing-room, sitting languidly in her chair and the blinds down, Mrs. Norton took her to task, and, before uttering a word, deliberately walked to the windows and drew up the blinds.

"Now, Licia," she said, putting her hands behind her back, and looking austere at her sister-in-law, "what do you mean by going on so?"

Mrs. Ford coloured angrily. The light annoyed her, and it was impertinent of Tom to draw up the blinds.

"I ask you what you mean by going on so," again said Mrs. Norton.

As she spoke the drawing-room door opened, Mab, sent by

Miss Lavinia, put in her blooming little face, and began softly :

"Please, ma'am—"

The sight of the child exasperated Mrs. Ford.

"Begone!" she exclaimed, turning almost fiercely upon her, "begone, and never come near me!"

The frightened child shut the door and vanished.

"Bad—very bad—," muttered Mrs. Norton shaking her head. "Licia," she stoutly added, speaking aloud, "what makes you hate that little grey eyes so?"

Mrs. Ford looked moody, and did not answer.

"Now," pursued Mrs. Norton, "I am a bitter enemy, for I *never* forgive," she emphatically added, "and so that Captain George will find when I can get hold of him; but Licia, I can't hate a child, I would scorn it, Licia," she added, warming with her subject. "I keep my resentment for grown-up men and women; I know we are told to forgive them, but I answer to that, Fiddle-de-dee!"

Mrs. Ford closed her eyes, leaned back in her chair, and made up her mind to listen.

"Nature," continued Mrs. Norton, without seeming aware that Mrs. Ford had not yet addressed or answered her, "Nature says 'don't forgive,' and I obey Nature. Besides, I have got a drop of Irish blood, and I am resentful and vindictive. It is very wrong and unchristian, of course; but I am so. Nelly's mother affronted me once, and I never forgave her. I would not bow to her, and when I meet that Captain George, I will not bow to him," added Mrs. Norton, summing up her resentment in this vindictive declaration.

But as Mrs. Ford gave her no reply, and as she had only spoken once since Mrs. Norton's entrance, and then not to that lady, Tom became aware of her silence, and asked, rather shortly,

"Do I bore you, Alicia?"

We are sorry to record Mrs. Ford's answer. It was at variance with all the laws of politeness.

"Yes," she said, briefly.

Poor thing—she could not help it; she was relapsing fast into her old state, when sight of faces and sound of voices were alike distasteful to her. Mrs. Norton was not at all offended, and assured her sister-in-law that she was even pleased with the frankness of her answer.

"I like sincerity," she said, emphatically; "for I practise it.

Now I met Mrs. Deacon yesterday, and what do you think she told me? Why, that Anna, little Anna Grey, was dead. What! I said—Anna Grey, who ran away with Captain Johnson? Now, I put it to you, Alicia—was there any harm in saying what everybody knows to be the case? Anna Grey did run away with Captain Johnson. But Mrs. Deacon was mightily offended. 'If she did run away with Captain Johnson,' she replied, very shortly, 'she came back, Mrs. Norton.' 'Well, Mrs. Deacon,' I replied, 'I do not think that was the best part of it; I think she had much better have stayed.' Off flounced Mrs. Deacon, saying, 'If she did run away with Captain Johnson, she was a good little thing, at all events: and there are some people who are always picking holes in other people, to make themselves out better than their neighbours, Mrs. Norton.' I let her go," continued Mrs. Norton, magnanimously, as if, by not detaining the offending Mrs. Deacon, she had shown her infinite mercy, "I let her go, but I am not sure that I shall bow to her again. However, I dare say I shall—for I like sincerity; and perhaps Mrs. Deacon was only sincere."

Mrs. Ford could endure no more. Impatience conquered every other feeling.

"Excuse me, Tom," she said, querulously; "but my head aches."

"Then why did you not tell me to go at once?" asked Mrs. Norton, in her sharpest tones; for perhaps Mrs. Ford's sincerity was becoming too strong. "Why did you not tell me to go, Alicia?"

Alicia twitched her nervous hands, and said, in the same querulous tones,

"If you would go down to Lavinia—she is below."

"Go down to that silly Miss Ford, who never found a man to marry her," cried Mrs. Norton, indignantly, tying her bonnet strings; "thank you, Alicia! However," she added, more calmly, "as your head aches, I shall leave you—only take care of yourself—and don't hate the child," she continued, with some pathos in her voice, "don't hate the poor little forsaken creature that was left at your door, Alicia. I have often seen her little scared face; and I tell you that though I never had a child of my own, Alicia, it has made my heart ache."

Mrs. Ford drew herself up haughtily.

"But she did not frighten me," as Mrs. Norton said afterwards, and thus they parted.

Little did Mrs. Norton suspect how bitter were the thoughts

of the poor sick woman, diseased in body as in mind, whom she had been lecturing.

"I am dying," thought Mrs. Ford, "I know I am; and he will marry Mab's mother when I am gone."

Thus she thought, and it was very bitter. But Mrs. Ford had a refuge, a mother's refuge, when such feelings oppressed her; she went to her children's room, not that they were there—but it held their clothes, their little beds, their toys, their books, the nearest and dearest tokens of their being and presence. There, whenever cankering sorrow proved too strong, she went and worked for them. She could not work on this day; Mab's face haunted her. She sat down on the nearest chair, and, with jealous envy, she thought again of the little golden-haired child who had stepped between her children and their father.

"And what will become of them when I am gone!" was the secret cry of her aching heart; "I cannot live, I know I cannot. And must a strange woman, the mother of that child, fill my place, and be set over my boys. God help me! God help me, indeed!"

She wrung her hands, wild fancies entered her troubled brain as she looked around that room which she had restored to pleasantness and comfort. She remembered a legend she had heard in her childhood, how the wronged orphan girl had called on her dead mother, and how that mother, breaking the bonds and ceremonies of the grave, had risen to protect her child.

"Oh! if it were but true," thought Alicia; "if the dead could but return, how I would come and watch over them! But it is not true," she thought again, after a dreary pause; "the dead are locked fast in their graves—fast as in a prison house. There is no rising again, no coming forth to watch and avenge—not till the last sad judgment-day. Once gone, I am powerless and helpless, and—God help me!—what can I do when I am here!"

Alas! it was true enough. She could do little or nothing. She had no property to bequeath, no will to make, no trustees, no executors to appoint, and her love would soon be as useless to her children as a treasure cast into the deep sea, fathoms away from mortal ken. Oh! for ten years of life! for ten years more!

Mrs. Ford rose and walked feverishly about the room; then, mechanically, she stopped before the little chest of drawers that held the clothes of her children. "Will *she* trouble herself about them when I am dead?" she thought, referring to Mab's un-

known mother ; "it is not likely—then; let me do what I can whilst life is mine."

She opened the chest of drawers, and took out its contents one by one. Mrs. Ford had been a careful housekeeper in her day, and she had kept a housekeeper's fondness for order and neatness. Tenderly, almost fondly, she took out the little shirts and socks of her younger boys ; gently she unfolded them one by one and set aside those that required mending.

"Perhaps they will allow Susan to do that," thought Mrs. Ford, persistently returning to the same subject ; "but, no, they will not keep Susan—Susan was too fond of me. Lavinia, perhaps ; no, she will not be here either. My children will be surrendered to the stranger. God grant she may not prove too unkind ! Oh ! God help me—I *cannot*, I cannot bear it !"

She sat down again, helpless, forlorn, and downcast. She leaned her head against the chest of drawers, and her tears flowed slowly and unconsciously. She felt that her case was beyond human aid, and, for the moment at least, she had no trust in divine assistance. On her lap and on the floor around her lay strewn the things she had taken from the drawers. She looked at them apathetically, with a cold and careless eye. Suddenly she started, she had caught sight of a slip of paper lying in the white folds of Robert's linen. What brought it there ? She stooped and picked it up. It was inscribed with characters strangely reversed. Tumultuous suspicions crowded her mind. The paper shook in her hand ; but yet it could not be what she thought. That would not be hidden in her children's clothes. She did what Robert, what her husband had done before her—she held it up to the looking-glass, read its contents, then sat down again, crushed with the blow.

CHAPTER XIII.

SOME minds have been framed by nature so as to shrink more than others of equal integrity from the breath of dishonour.

Alicia was not merely an upright woman, incapable of wrong doing, she also held the least dereliction from the severest laws of right in inexorable abhorrence ; and Mr. Ford's want of delicacy in many little things which he could not conceal from her, his shortcomings of the heroic standard in this as in all else, had contributed to alienate his wife's proud heart. Still she thought him honest, incapable of abetting fraud and wrong, incapable of

injuring the innocent and the weak, and now she knew how the case stood.

Not for a moment did she doubt the genuineness of the letter that betrayed his secret. That, then, was the meaning of every contradiction that had irritated and stung her insane jealousy. They were living, she, her husband, her children were living on the wages of sin. The child whom she had secretly hated as the wronger of her children, was in reality the wronged one. The comfort, the creeping luxury of their home, were the fruits of iniquity—of the plunder of a child.

She rushed down-stairs in a transport of grief, and the first object that met her sight as she entered her own room was the harmonium. She remembered at what time it had been bought—she knew now with what money! She crushed the paper she still held. No doubt, no thought of possible innocence softened the bitterness of her feelings. She did not believe that letter had been written by Mab's mother. What mother would thrust her child on Mr. Ford? She believed that Mab had been put out of the way, not of shame and disgrace, but of wealth and of inheritance, and she thought that her husband had been chosen because he was poor, needy, and weak of principle; because it was known he would keep the money and tell no tales.

And she was his wife!

"Oh! the other thing was nothing," thought Mrs. Ford, clasping her hands in despair, "*this* is the crowning misery."

"Did you ring, ma'am?" asked Susan, who, after tapping at the door, now looked in.

"No, but come in—I want you, Susan."

Susan looked at her mistress and shook her head.

"You are doing for yourself, ma'am, you are."

"Susan, I am struck," said Mrs. Ford, "I am struck."

"Struck, ma'am, where?"

"Here!" and she laid her hand on her heart.

"Now, ma'am, it is not what you think. Indeed, and indeed, ma'am, it is not."

"Hush!" said her mistress, "you are thinking of one thing, and I of another; but I can tell you nothing, nothing, Susan—only this: I am struck—struck to the heart, and forever!"

Susan looked at her mistress in doubtful amazement, and stood before her silent and perplexed.

"Susan help me to go to bed," said Mrs. Ford; "it is all over—all over."

"What is, ma'am?"

"Life, Susan. It is all over ; help me to go to bed."

Susan, much alarmed, yet unwilling to betray her fears, assisted her mistress, who seemed scarcely able to stand, into the next room, undressed her, and helped her to get into bed.

Mrs. Ford sighed deeply, and closed her eyes as her head sank on the pillow.

"Susan," she said, "this bed is my grave. I shall never rise again—never."

"Shall I go for Miss Lavinia, ma'am?" asked Susan, getting more and more frightened.

"No—send Mab up to me. Do as I bid you, Susan—send up the child."

Susan shook her head doubtfully, but she obeyed, and in a few minutes little Mab came in, shrinkingly. With evident reluctance she approached Mrs. Ford's bed, and with some alarm she felt that lady's hand laid on her shoulder.

"Do not be frightened, child—I will not hurt you," said Mrs. Ford, "I only want you to answer me a few questions. Where were you before you came here—to this house?"

Mab's face expressed decided annoyance. She had been questioned more than she liked. Mr. Ford, Robert, Miss Lavinia, Susan, Captain George and his brother, and Mrs. Thomasina Norton, had each in turn tried to worry the truth out of her.

"I don't know," she said crossly, enough, "not a bit. I was there, you know."

"Go and fetch that picture book," said Mrs. Ford, pointing to a thin quarto on a table.

Mab ran nimbly enough for it, and came back beaming.

"And now," said Mrs. Ford, "open it and show me *there*."

The book was one of views of mansions in various parts of England. Mrs. Ford, who knew already that Mab described her home as one of some extent, thought that some resemblance might strike the child's eye and give a clue, howsoever faint. But Mab, though not an untruthful, was an imaginative child, and Mrs. Ford sighed to see how many *theres* Mab found in the book, every one unlike the other. One had castellated walls, one was pure Elizabethan, another, again, had turrets, and a fourth was an Italian-roofed mansion, with cool porticoes and marble colonnades. It was the same, when, in the course of her questions, Mrs. Ford came on that *he* who had provoked and perplexed Robert.

"Was *he* there?" asked Mrs. Ford, with injudicious eagerness.

Mab looked puzzled, and put her finger on her lips.

"I don't know," she said, at length, "it is so long ago, but *there* was a fine place, with beautiful trees and a great deal of water, and he used to walk with me, and help me to pick up shells."

"Then it was by the sea?"

"Oh yes! and he gathered the acorns."

"It was in autumn!" ejaculated Mrs. Ford.

"I don't know, but he was very fond of me—we used to play at hide-and-seek in the square."

"What square?"

"Why, this of course. Don't you know?—round the statue of queen Anne."

Mrs. Ford's countenance fell. It was plain that dreamy invention and present realities mingled unconsciously in the mind of the child, that *he* had become a myth round which all sorts of strange fancies blended in little Mab's brain. It was useless to set her right, useless to reprove her. Mrs. Ford only sighed drearily.

Mab laughed to herself.

"I could tell you something," she said, saucily, "I could—but I won't."

"I shall bribe you—what will you have?"

"Play for me."

She nodded towards the harmonium. Mrs. Ford tried to lead her away from this inconvenient whim, but opposition only made Mab obstinate. She would have music or nothing. Mrs. Ford yielded. She rose, trembling with fever, and seated herself before the instrument. She played—and played very sweetly, though very sadly, a movement from an old master.

"And now tell me," she said, faintly.

Mab rose on tiptoe, and said, mysteriously,

"You know that grey old gentleman I saw that evening, when I got Noah's Ark?"

"At Captain George's?"

Mab nodded.

"Well."

"Well! he put so many questions to me—but I did not tell him."

"Tell him what?"

"That I had seen him there, you know."

"You saw him!" exclaimed Mrs. Ford.

"Yes," confidently replied Mab, "I did; he kept his hat over his face, but I knew him quite well, he is so ugly."

Mrs. Ford rose with a low cry. She knew now whence the blow had come, and knowing it, she saw the evil was hopeless.

"My dear! what is the matter?" exclaimed Mr. Ford, entering the room. "Why, you will get your death of cold in your night-clothes; you surely are not unwell?"

Mrs. Ford never answered him. She tottered back to her bed with chattering teeth, and moaned aloud as her head sank once more on her pillow.

"What is the matter?" said Mr. Ford, sitting down in a deep arm-chair by her.

"A spasm," gasped his wife, "do not mind it; it is nothing."

"Of course not," cheerfully said Mr. Ford. "Come here, little Mab," he gaily added, drawing her up on his knee, "Oh! you like that, you little puss, eh?" and he gave her a kiss.

"He can, he dare kiss her," thought Mrs. Ford; "oh! what a man!"

In that buoyant tone which in him indicated the height of good humour, Mr. Ford now said to his wife:

"My dear Alicia, I wish you would leave off that old-fashioned dress you had on this morning. It is horrid. You must leave it off, my love."

"Must I?" said Mrs. Ford, bitterly: "yes, I think I shall."

"Of course. Ten pounds will surely buy you something better, and it would be a hard case if I had not ten pounds to spare my wife. What paper are you crushing so, my dear?"

Mrs. Ford gasped that it was nothing.

"Then there's the drawing-room," pursued Mr. Ford; "it will not do. You were ill so long I did not like to disturb you, but now we must renovate the place, we must. Besides, our position is altering daily. You see," he added, thrusting his hand into his pocket, and playing with some loose gold there, "you see, Alicia, a man of talent *cannot* be kept down. A few months ago, we were—well, no matter, but now I am in a rapid way of making a really handsome fortune. You would be amazed if I were to tell you how a miserable sum of five hundred pounds which I had by me has swollen into—well, no matter. It was all the opening; there was no opening formerly—but now the opening has come, and of course it is all right. I knew it would be in the end. I always told you so; 'only give me time, Alicia,' I said, 'and I will make a rich woman of you yet.'"

He kept rolling the sovereigns in his pocket with one hand, whilst the other played with Mab's hair. Mrs. Ford pressed her two hands to her beating heart, but she said nothing; she had resolved not to speak yet, even though that heart should break.

"And it is surprising when once luck sets in, how it will pour in," continued Mr. Ford, in the same cool and easy tone; "those sly Georges! they had an inkling of it; I could not keep it from them, owing to various causes, and that deep old dodger, James, has this very morning asked me for Robert."

"What?" cried Mrs. Ford.

"My dear, how you excite yourself! Why, it is a capital thing for the boy. James George is one of the great men of the city, and these men are up to everything, of course. Well, he stopped me this morning, near the Bank, and wanted to know if I had no sons. I told him I had only boys, but he said, very handsome though true, boys reared in business habits as mine must be, were invaluable, and could I spare him one. I put him off with Bob's age, but he would not be frightened; however, I played and played with him until he became as fidgetty as a bee, and actually offered me sixty pounds a year for the lad's services in his counting-house."

"Sixty pounds a year for Robert!"

"My love, do not look so amazed, but I forget you know nothing of business. Robert is just what I was at his age—invaluable. Why, his name alone, Robert Ford, is a guarantee."

"But you did not accept, you cannot have accepted!" cried Mrs. Ford. "You must see that this is a trap, a bribe, a dreadful snare for that boy and you."

Mr. Ford looked amazed.

"My love," he said, "your mind is wandering. And as to accepting, why, of course I did. Robert's duties begin next Monday."

"You must break your word!" exclaimed Mrs. Ford, in despair; "I will not have my child's soul bartered. I tell you, Mr. Ford, you must break your word."

Mr. Ford looked bewildered and perplexed.

"Break my word, my love," he said. "I really would if I could to gratify you, but it is out of the question; Mr. George made me sign——"

He said no more. His wife, who had sat up in the energy of her remonstrances, now sank back with a low moan.

She had fainted. It was hours ere she returned to conscious-

ness ; and when she did, she was passive, inert, and cold ; once more the woman of former days.

There seemed little in such an event to please anyone, yet when Mrs. Norton called in a few days, she had the satisfaction of finding her prophecy fulfilled.

Of course she was very sorry for it, but, as she belonged to the class of the "I knew it," and "I told you so,"—a countless tribe in every generation,—her eye brightened as she informed Mrs. Ford that she had accurately foretold her present condition. Mrs. Ford, who now kept her bed, heard her without heeding her. She was listening to Robert talking to Mab in the drawing-room, for she would now scarcely let the child out of her sight, and her heart ached to hear Robert, who had already entered on his duties at Mr. George's, say to his little companion,

"This is all very well for the beginning, Mab ; but I cannot stop at sixty pounds a year, can I ? I must push on William and Edward, as I get on myself."

"Of course," answered Mab.

"God help me !" thought Mrs. Ford ; "the boy is his father's echo. Good fortune, success, inspire him with no mistrust, with no surprise. God help me !"

"And now," continued Mrs. Norton's voice, which had been going on for some time, "I shall tell you what you must do, Alicia. You must take a piece of flannel and fold it four times—so—you see—but do you see ?"

"Yes, I do."

"I thought your eyes were shut. Well, as I said, you must fold a piece of flannel—Bless me, who is that talking below ?"

Mrs. Ford knew her husband's voice, and, from its tones, she knew, too, that he had been drinking. He came up the stairs talking loudly to Susan.

"Missus is but poorly, sir," austerely said the servant.

"Over-excitement," replied Mr. Ford. "Well, I have got something for her. Go downstairs, Susan, and bring me up the parcel on the dining-room table ; and hark ye, Susan, take this—you are a good girl, Susan ; I have a regard for you, Susan."

Opening his wife's room door as he spoke, he slipped a sovereign into the astonished girl's hand, and gave her a Lancashire slap on the shoulder that helped her a step down the staircase ; then, without seeming to perceive Mrs. Norton's presence, he walked up to his wife's bed, with his hat still on, and his flushed face telling plainly of gin and water.

"Good evening, Mr. Ford," drily said Mrs. Norton.

"Good evening, ma'am. I heard from your friend—Captain George, you know. He sends his love."

Mrs. Norton did not look angered in the least, but she bent her keen eye on Mr. Ford, and read his face.

"Something has happened to that man," she thought, as she surveyed the haggard lines of his countenance. "I never saw him look so before, never."

Never, indeed, had Mr. Ford worn that wild look, half fearful, half defiant. Never had his voice been so boisterous, and yet so sullen. He seemed unable to keep silent.

"I have been with Mr. George," he said; "a thorough good fellow is Mr. George. You know the Georges, my love?"

His wife shuddered, and answered that she knew them.

"Robert is getting on capitally, it seems; astonished the oldest clerks in the office. That boy is just like me; I told them so."

"And I once loved that man," thought Alicia.

"Capital luck to-day," hiccupped Mr. Ford. "Now," he added, turning to his wife, and not heeding Mrs. Norton's presence, "how much do you think I cleared to-day, Alicia?"

Mrs. Ford opened her eyes wide, her pale lips parted, and she gasped forth,

"I do not know."

Mr. Ford stopped, and whispered hoarsely,

"A thousand pounds, Alicia, a thousand pounds," and, thrusting his hands in his pockets, he began rolling the gold there with a sort of wild exultation.

"Here's the parcel, sir," said Susan, opening the door; "shall I open it?"

"Do, Susan, do. I like you, Susan. On my word I do."

Susan simpered; at another time she would have snapped at this declaration of affection; but the sovereign had softened her much, and she quickly undid the parcel.

A black silk dress of the finest quality was its contents.

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Susan. "Well, I never!"

"Hold it up, Susan—hold it up. There's silk for you! Well, Alicia, what do you say to that?"

Mrs. Ford did not answer; her features remained rigid, and her clasped fingers worked strangely.

"Missus's head aches, sir," quickly put in Susan. "It was a pity to show her the handsome dress to-night. She will see it better to-morrow, sir."

"True enough," said Mr. Ford, with a nod; "put it away—there, that will do. You may go, Susan."

"I think I shall go too," rather drily said Mrs. Norton, rising; "I fancy Mr. Ford has something to say to you, Alicia."

Mr. Ford started, and stared at Mrs. Norton, and even Alicia roused herself; for there was something in this speech that struck both as a homethrust; but, without appearing to notice the impression she had produced, Mrs. Norton took her leave. Robert and Mab went down stairs at the same time, and Mr. Ford remained alone with his wife; he seemed in an unusually communicative mood.

"And you never ask me how I cleared those thousand pounds," said he, throwing himself into the chair Mrs. Norton had just vacated. "No curiosity. Eh, Alicia!"

"Ay, ay, do tell me," she whispered, eagerly, "do tell me, John."

"Well there it is; don't look at me so, my dear; are you really ill?"

"No," she answered, faintly, and she closed her eyes; "go on."

"I told you, the other day, about those five hundred pounds."

"What five hundred pounds?"

"An old debt. Well, I invested them in what every one thought the worst speculation in England; but *I* saw—bless you, *I* saw. I bought cheap, sold dear, bought again, sold out, and in short that is how I am a thousand pounds richer to-night than I was this morning."

"Then that money comes from the five hundred pounds?" said Alicia.

"It does; but why do you ask?" replied her husband, a little sobered by her look and tone.

"And where did those five hundred pounds come from?" she persisted—"from the Georges?"

"Ye-es," stammered Mr. Ford, "from the Georges. They have come into thirty or forty thousand pounds lately."

"But Captain George made you lose more than five hundred pounds formerly."

"My dear, you know the man; besides, Robert has got into that capital situation."

"And who was she that died and left them all that money?" cried Mrs. Ford, sitting upright in her bed; "who was she, Mr. Ford?"

He turned very pale.

"I—don't know," he gasped: "a maiden cousin, I believe."

"And is she dead?—is she really dead?" asked his wife.

"Of course she is dead," began Mr. Ford, laughing aloud, rather hoarsely; but he stopped short, and turned ghastly pale.

Mab had stolen upstairs again, and now stood by his side, expecting the caress he always gave her. He stared at her; he took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead, and looked at his wife, whose blue eyes read him through and through; then, stammering something about the heat, he left the room and walked down stairs.

Little Mab sat down abashed in a corner of the room.

"He knows it," moaned his wife, "he knows it, and he has sold his soul for five hundred pounds."

It was late when Mrs. Ford fell asleep that night; but at length her eyes closed, and slumbers sound and deep overtook her. In the middle of the night she was awakened, however, by a low moaning near her. A night-lamp always burned in her room, and by its light she saw her husband sitting on a chair wiping the cold dew from his forehead, and gasping for breath.

She sat up, first thinking he was ill, then, because she felt eager and watchful; he seemed struggling with nightmare, and still between sleep and waking.

"You need not look at me so, Alicia," he said, staring at her; "I shall deny it all—I shall deny it, Alicia. Where is the child?"

"Hush!" she said, stretching out her trembling hand to him, "hush—it was a bad dream—a nightmare."

"I tell you I do not know who she is," he said, half angrily. "I would not ask. What business of mine was it, I know nothing."

"Awake," whispered his wife, bending toward him, "awake, John, you are dreaming."

He did awake with a start and a deep sigh, then he looked suspiciously at his wife.

"I daresay I have been talking a precious deal of nonsense?" he said, after a pause; "people always do when they are dreaming."

Mrs. Ford looked unmoved.

"You took something that disagreed with you," she said, coldly; "only I wish you had not come in here to disturb my sleep."

"I am going, my dear," said Mr. Ford, recovering. "I took something that disagreed with me, as you say, I have no doubt."

He walked to the door, then came back.

"I remember I had outlets, depend upon it that was it."

"Pray leave me," was his wife's cold reply.

And slowly and submissively Mr. Ford went back to his room.

CHAPTER XIV.

From that evening forward, Mr. Ford was an altered man. Until he had known how and why Mab had been left at his door, his guilt had sat lightly upon him. He had smothered the secret voice that bade him search and inquire, he had been satisfied to believe in the letter, and to close his eyes to all further knowledge; but Mr. Ford had to do with men who wanted no unconscious accomplice, for such they held to be dangerous. Perhaps, too, they did not believe in his blindness; however that might be, they would not indulge him in it. Mr. Ford could never know the whole truth, and he could not prove one tittle of it; but he could talk, and suspicion is unpleasant and inconvenient. No better plan offered itself to them than to bind him by advantages—great to him, small to them.

Such were Mab's five hundred pounds, and Robert's situation. If Mr. Ford should prove ungrateful or too exacting, and human nature is liable to both, dangers which he little suspected were kept in store for him, ready to doom him to irretrievable destruction.

Thus, unwilling though he was, Mr. Ford was compelled to suspect, and once suspicion was awakened, conscience forced him to interpret every token, every sign, until the bitter and perfect knowledge came.

Then began the fearful battle of conscience and remorse in John Ford's soul. He knew beyond a doubt Mab's name, station, and wealth. She was of an ancient race. A fair home, a noble inheritance were hers. Of these he had unconsciously at first, willingly in the end, and always guiltily, helped to rob her—and for what? For five hundred pounds! He had sold the rights of the forlorn orphan child, and his own honour, for that miserable pittance. True, he had thriven on the wages of sin; his own honest though imprudent ventures had never prospered, this the bribe of iniquity to faltering principle had been the fruitful seed of an abundant harvest.

There were moments when the thought maddened him, when

he cursed the gold that came so readily at the call of evil, and that had been so tardy to appear in his days of struggling integrity. At other times, his own success rendered him callous. Then he doubted Providence, and scorned retribution; then honesty was folly in his eyes, and successful wrong the only wisdom. In those fearful moments, Mr. Ford went about the house with a buoyant step and a bright eye; his joke was ever ready for Susan, he would throw the boys sixpences, and buy his sister a shawl or a new dress.

"Master is quite pleasant to-day," Susan would say, whilst the boys exulted over "Pa's jolly good-humour," and Miss Lavinia would think how kind John was.

But these were only flashes that rendered the succeeding darkness more apparent. There were days when instead of rejoicing in the triumph of his iniquity, instead of reckoning up his gains, and laughing at the honest fool he had been so long, Mr. Ford felt his heart fail, and his spirit tremble; when he woke at night, with cold perspiration on his forehead, a detected and disgraced man in the eyes of the world, a condemned man before the awful tribunal of God's justice. Then he was sullen, gloomy, and when spoken to, or irritated, savage. Then Susan would wisely remain in her kitchen, and Miss Ford in her room; then the boys would keep out of their father's way, and Mab alone could venture to address him. It was not love, it was not tenderness, it was shame that subdued him in the presence of the child. Whatever his mood might be, she was safe from his anger, safe from his sharpest speech. He could not add a deeper wrong to a wrong already so great.

There was another mood into which Mr. Ford often fell, and this, the saddest of all, was the inert and the hopeless. He then saw the past in its true aspect, himself a sorely tempted and needy man, his tempters strong and secure against him. Even though he had turned the child from his door, he could neither have served nor have saved her. And, if he was helpless then, how much more so was he now! He had no proof: his word was nothing: that the guilty ones were armed against every assertion he could utter, was morally certain. He must bear his fate, he must live in his sin; he was bound to it as Ixion to his wheel. He must go on wronging the child, and thriving on that wrong, rearing himself a prosperous home, a fair name, the world's regard, his children's fortune out of it. Sometimes Mr. Ford had thoughts of a dark escape out of the snare. He would walk on the bridges, and look down at the black Thames with

wild longing. What kept him back? That which had made him weak? That infirm purpose that had found him so ready to fall into temptation, saved him at least from a great sin. He who had not known how to live well did not know how to die desperately. To linger through life a prey to useless remorse, to unproductive shame, to contrition that could not atone—such was his lot.

And whilst he sullenly submitted to, or fiercely struggled against that lot, his wife, unable to bear the new misery his guilt had entailed upon her, was journeying fast to the grave. Everyone knew it save Mr. Ford and the children. He had so long seen her ailing that he could not believe in her danger. Alicia was very poorly, but she would, she must get over it. He acted on that belief, and Mrs. Ford, though she constantly spoke of her approaching end, acted on it, too. Her mind was full of plans in which Mab took a prominent part. She could scarcely bear to let the child out of her sight, and fatigued her by that incessant watchfulness. Mab wanted to be below with the boys, with Susan even, and not in the dull sick-room; but Mrs. Ford grew restless when she was not by, and querulously complained, "They were always taking the child away."

Mrs. Norton, who proved a very constant and assiduous nurse, was struck with this inexplicable change. Why had Alicia grown so fond of the child all of a sudden? Many other things struck her. She felt convinced that some dreary secret weighed on Alicia's mind, and that in this secret her wild, haggard-looking husband had a part. That it related to Mab, she did not suspect; she thought of money matters, and she had not sufficient respect for Mr. Ford to feel very confident of his integrity. "I dare say he has done nothing to be transported for," she coolly thought; "only Alicia is such a methodist in her notions."

Indeed, it only seemed to Mrs. Norton common charity to set Alicia right, and she proceeded to do so on a cold December afternoon.

Mrs. Ford was excitable that day. She sat up in bed, her cheeks flushed, her eyes very bright, far too bright.

"Mab, where is Mab?" she asked.

"Mab is gone down," replied Mrs. Norton, "the child wants to stir, Alicia."

"But I want her, Tom, I want her."

"What for?"

"I want to see that she is safe."

"Safe! Oh! she is safe enough. What should make her unsafe?"

"But I want to have my way," querulously exclaimed Mrs. Ford; "I am dying, I know I am, and yet I am not allowed to have my way."

"Dying! nonsense."

Mrs. Ford probably concluded it was nonsense, for she resumed,

"Besides, I want Mab. The child is dreadfully neglected. I want to teach her. I have no doubt she will have a high position some day, and she must be suited to it."

Her mind was evidently wandering; Mrs. Norton always made it a point to set people right when she could do so.

"Now, 'Licia," she said, "how can you talk of Mab's having a high position? A child left at your door, and taken in by your husband's charity! Nonsense!"

Mrs. Ford looked wildly at her.

"Oh, Tom!" she said; "Oh, Tom!" She clasped her hands, and could say no more.

"Now, Alicia, what does ail you?" asked her sister-in-law. "What is it?"

"Don't ask, Tom, don't."

"Well, then, what is it? I know it is about your husband."

Mrs. Ford shuddered.

"Oh! the weight of sin!" she moaned. "The weight of the sin you know, and cannot prevent! Of the sin that will condemn you on the terrible Day of Judgment!"

"Now, Alicia, don't go on so," half-indignantly exclaimed Mrs. Norton; "your husband is neither a thief nor a murderer. And even if he were," she excitedly added, "would you not rather be lost with him, than saved without him? Of course you would," continued Mrs. Norton, warming with her subject.

Mrs. Ford looked gloomy, but did not answer.

"For my part," continued Mrs. Norton, coolly, "this is a subject on which my mind has long been made up. My dear husband was what you good people call a heathen; well, then, I am a heathen too. I am firmly resolved to be wherever he is in the next world, as I was in this. I shall live and die as he did."

"You prefer the creature to the Creator!" exclaimed Alicia, amazed.

"I suppose my feelings are free," replied Mrs. Norton, with some asperity; "and, if I were you, Alicia," she added, more

gently, "I would stick to my husband through this world and the next. And I should prefer being lost with him, to being saved without him."

Alicia's mind was naturally too religious to like so extraordinary and indecorous a profession of faith.

"This is a subject on which you may talk as you please, Tom," she said, with some irony, "for who is to put you to the proof?"

"Thank you!" replied Mrs. Norton, colouring up, and rising; "I am much obliged to you, Alicia; but I will say this, it would be better if you loved your husband more, a little more, and then his sins would trouble you less."

With this Mrs. Norton took her leave.

This conversation effectually checked a passing wish, which Mrs. Ford had for a moment entertained, of taking Mrs. Norton into her confidence, and of abiding by her advice. It was plain by this singular declaration of theological belief, that Mrs. Norton's judgment was not to be trusted whenever a husband was at stake.

Then Alicia thought of her sister-in-law, Lavinia. She was conscientious, pure-minded, and honourable. "Perhaps she will give me comfort," thought Mrs. Ford, yearning, as we all do, for human aid and sympathy; and, as soon as Mrs. Norton was gone, she made the attempt.

"Lavinia," she said, addressing her sister-in-law, who had come up with the night-lamp, and had settled herself down to read in an arm-chair, "Lavinia, what would you do if you found yourself unwillingly abetting a wrong. For instance, enjoying property that had been unjustly taken from another?"

Miss Ford looked up from her prayer-book. The night-lamp, whilst it left the rest of the room in darkness, lit Mrs. Ford's white sheet and curtains, and fell full on her wasted face.

"But that could not be," exclaimed Miss Lavinia, much startled. "I would die of hunger first, I would beg my bread!"

"But if, for instance, you were married; if your husband were guilty, and you were obliged to share his guilt, though abhorring it?"

"I would not!" cried Miss Lavinia; "I would fly from him to the world's end——"

"And break one duty to fulfil another. Oh, Lavinia! that is not it yet—that is not it!"

"Well, then, I would pray to him to repent and atone," said Miss Lavinia, excitedly.

"And if he would not?"

"If he would not, I would throw myself on God's mercy, and leave him to his fate."

As she spoke, the door opened, and Mr. Ford entered the room.

"Lavinia," cried Mrs. Ford, sitting up in her bed "leave us—leave us. I have something to say to my husband."

Miss Ford and her brother exchanged startled glances. She looked wild, very wild, and it was rare to hear her say those words, "My husband."

"Very well," said Miss Ford feeling vaguely agitated; "very well, Alicia. I shall go."

She left the room as she spoke.

CHAPTER XV.

"Well, my dear, how do you feel?" asked Mr. Ford, sitting down in the chair his sister had just left.

She opened her large blue eyes, unnaturally bright, and gave him a look that startled him.

"Mr. Ford," she said, "how do *you* feel?"

"Oh! very well, my love—if you——"

"I do not speak of your body, but of your soul. How does it feel, Mr. Ford?"

"My love!" he exclaimed.

"Call me Alicia—Alicia Norton," she said, sharply.

Mr. Ford looked doubtfully at his wife. Could she know. It seemed impossible, and yet what did she mean?

"Be true to yourself—be true to the child," exclaimed his wife, clasping her hands imploringly, "be true to the poor child, who was left at your door."

"I took her in, and what more can I do?" said Mr. Ford.

"Right her—she is wronged; she was found in the way and sent to you for that—do her justice."

"My dear," he soothingly replied, "what do I know about the poor child? I do all I can for her—perhaps, as you say, she was found in the way, but how can I help it?"

"He will not understand—he will not understand," moaned his wife. "Mr. Ford, do you know this?" she cried, drawing

from beneath her pillow a slip of crumpled paper, which she thrust into his hand; "do you know this?"

"Ye-es," stammered her husband, turning red and pale; "it was pinned to the child's dress."

"And there was money in it, money which you took."

"Five hundred pounds—no more."

"And you took that money?"

"Why not?" he replied, rallying, "the interest of it will barely pay for her maintenance."

"You confess it—you sold your honour for five hundred pounds—for five hundred pounds!"

Mr. Ford's countenance was no longer pale, but grey and leaden.

"Have you anything more to say?" he asked.

"Yes, John, I have. Do not say I have not spared you; I have kept your secret till it has killed me, and now, on my death-bed, I can keep it no longer. I must separate my cause from yours. I must not let the sin of the guilty father be visited on my innocent children."

Mr. Ford groaned aloud. The keenest pang he could know—shame before his wife—had overtaken him. Cold perspiration stood on his forehead; he wiped it away, and said, apathetically,

"Go on, Alicia."

"Go on," she repeated, "and what more can I say? You know that my threats are vain. That I cannot, if I would, ruin the father of my boys. You know that I am helpless and powerless, and that I can only ask you to have mercy upon them, to have mercy upon your own soul. Do you know who that child is?"

Mr. Ford remained mute, and stared at his wife in silent anguish.

"He does, he does know it," she moaned, wringing her hands, "and he will not atone, and the sins of guilty parents are visited on the offspring—it is Bible truth, it is Gospel truth, and my children will be reared on the fruits of iniquity."

"Have mercy on me, Alicia!"

"Have mercy on yourself. Think not of the money—let us perish, starve, beg our bread, but let us repair the wrong. Have mercy on your own soul, Mr. Ford; think of your salvation, of the next world. Saints have trembled to think of it; have mercy on your own soul."

"Alicia, do not be hard on me."

"Do you know who she is?"

He did not answer.

"Because, if you do not, I will tell you. She is the rightful owner of the money the Georges are now enjoying. Right her, and all will be well yet."

"I cannot—I have no proof."

"Have the matter searched, take her to a magistrate, wash your hands of that guilty money, tell all—be an honest man once more."

"Alicia, you ask me for my own ruin and dishonour—I cannot—I will not."

"Right the child—right the child, and make your peace with God."

"I cannot, you ask me for death—for worse than death a hundredfold. Besides, it would be useless; it is too late."

"Too late!" she moaned; "then it might have been done—too late!"

"Oh! Alicia, don't be hard upon me! You do not know how I was tempted. Not a farthing in the house, and that devil came and lured me with as fair a chance of making a fortune as man ever had, and we were deep in debt, and Lavinia had come, and you wanted that harmonium, and I had not a shilling to pay for the boys' schooling, and you knew nothing of how matters were going on down-stairs, and, as I said, you wanted——"

"You did it for me," exclaimed his wife, wildly, "you did it for me!"

"Alicia, you say I have sold my soul, well, then, I would have sold my soul for you—I have always loved you beyond everything else in this world,—and hard as you are on me now, I love you dearly still."

His wife shuddered, and, sinking back on her pillow, turned her face to the wall.

"There, go—that will do," she said, motioning him away—"it is useless to say more, leave me."

But he did not go.

"Alicia," he said, "if restitution were in my power I would restore, I would, Alicia. As it is, believe me when I tell you I will be true to her—I will toil like a slave for the boys, and since it is your fancy, Alicia—they shall not have any of that money."

"Leave me," said his wife, "my heart is sick—sick even unto death. Oh! God, I thank thee that I am dying!"

Mr. Ford rose, trembling.

"Alicia," he said, "I cannot leave you thus—you must say something to me."

She did not reply.

"Alicia, have you nothing to say to me?"

"Leave me."

"Alicia Norton, have you nothing—not one word for me?"

"Leave me," she said again, "do not make me speak."

"Alicia, you are hard. I thought you loved me."

He said it thinking to draw forth assurances of affection, but the truth which had been smothering her for years, broke forth.

"He thought I loved him!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands in strange amazement—"he thought I loved him!"

"I am sure of it, Alicia," he said, trying to smile.

"I do not—" she cried, "I will not die with a lie on my lips—I do not love you—I have not loved you for years!"

Death itself seemed to enter Mr. Ford's heart. His long blindness vanished in a moment—the faith of years perished without recall. He smiled vacantly at his wife. She did not love him, the object of such fond worship, of so many sacrifices, had been alienated for years. He had fed himself with foolish illusions, gloried in that affection, made a boast of it, and it was all over; she had not loved, and now he felt and saw it—she despised him.

"I suppose you could not help it, Alicia," he sighed, "but it's a blow—it's a blow!" And reeling like a drunken man, he left the presence of his contemner. It was a blow, one of the blows which men like Mr. Ford never recover.

He still reeled when he got into the square. Where was he going? Where instinct led him, to the presence of the man that had begun all his woe.

Captain George had left Mrs. George in Italy, and had come back to England on some important business, as he was pleased to call it. He had taken up his abode in some chambers, as he styled them, in the vicinity of Piccadilly, and to these Mr. Ford now made his way. It so chanced that Captain George was within and alone. Mr. Ford found him attired in a magnificent dressing-gown, lying on a couch, and dividing his attentions between a novel on one hand—Captain George was fond of light literature—and a rum bottle on the other.

"How do you do, old fellow?" said he, nodding kindly to Mr. Ford; "sit down; here you find me a lonely bachelor, reading one of the prettiest stories I have read for a long time—I must take it to Mrs. George—she will like it of all things."

Now, Ford, do you know what I like in a story?—It is when it is kept up—it must be kept up, you know—only, how is it done? I protest, sir, it is a mystery to me. However, I like this one amazingly, and, not feeling over-well this evening, I thought I might as well stay at home and go on with my third volume.”

“Captain George,” said Mr. Ford, who was extremely pale, “I have something of importance to say to you. I know who the child is—the child that was left at my door.”

“Do you?” replied Captain George, looking much interested; “and who is little ‘Never Mind?’”

“She is the one whom you called your cousin, Captain George, that maiden lady, as you said, who left your brother and you a handsome fortune.”

Captain George burst out laughing.

“Look at him,” said he, pointing his finger at his guest; “he says it with a grave face too—look at him! Oh! he is a rare one, old Ford is—a rare one for a joke!”

“I tell you I will not be your dupe!” cried Mr. Ford, almost fiercely; “you have made me desperate, and I do not care who hears me—so mind and drop those ways.”

The loudness of his voice sobered Captain George.

“Well,” he said, coolly, “what about the little impostor?”

“Here is your money,” replied Mr. Ford, throwing some notes on the table, “and I wash my hands of your proceedings and you.”

“More easily said than done,” quietly said Captain George, turning down the page he had been reading. “Why did you take that money?”

“Why! because you came to me in my desperate necessity! But I knew nothing——”

“Oh! oh!” interrupted Captain George, with a significant nod, “that will not do—never do. You knew well enough who the child was all the time, and very handsomely too you were paid. James said a hundred would do, but I said no. The man is poor, James, and he has a family, let it be five hundred—a terrible battle I had with James; but I won the day, and now there is your gratitude; I declare I am sick of human nature. Ugh!”

“When you say I knew who the child was, you say that which is not true,” exclaimed Mr. Ford, pale with passion; “I knew—I suspected nothing.”

“And took and invested the money without inquiry—with-

out referring to a magistrate, and you a legal man too! Pooh! pooh! my dear fellow, *that* will never do—say something else—*that* will never do.”

Mr. Ford said nothing else.

“I tell you we are invulnerable,” complacently resumed Captain George; “we have legal death on our side. But nothing is impossible—you may find out a weak point in our case, and show us up at the Old Bailey if you like! What about it?—If we fall, you fall first. *I* can prove your guilt, and you cannot prove your innocence.”

“My guilt!” said Mr. Ford, scornfully.

“Your guilt,” said Captain George, smoothing his moustache. “Now, just listen to me—it was beautifully managed! You remember the day you called on James; I think you wanted him to stand security—something of that kind—for a harmonium. Well, that day James was robbed of a hundred pound note. He knew the number, and stopped it at the bank. Exactly three days after this, that note, bearing your name and address, came into our hands. We have it still. We were merciful, however; but mercy has its bounds, and if you will trump up stories of children left at your door with bank-notes pinned to their cloaks, we must in self-defence ask you to explain how this stolen note came into your possession. Perhaps you will say it came with the child! My dear fellow, who will believe you?—just tell me that—who will believe you?”

Mr. Ford had not expected this. Out of this snare he could see no issue. It was true enough that he had called on Mr. James, and he remembered now that he had remained alone for a few minutes in the same room with that gentleman’s desk. He certainly could have stolen the note, and if the stolen property bearing his signature was in their hands, what proof of innocence could he give?

“Oh! James is a deep one,” said Captain George; “and do not think that is all!—he has more in store for you—only he has not trusted even me with his plans. But this I can tell you: stay quiet, and you are safe. We have no sort of interest in ruining you. We have put you in a very fair way of making money, and you are making money, I know. James has taken one of your boys off your hands—in short, we have been most liberal, and your connection with us is the only piece of good luck you ever had in your life. Do not quarrel with Fortune when she comes to you, my boy—take the advice of an old soldier who knows something about the lady’s ways. She comes

rarely, and once rudely received returns no more. Take it easy, keep quiet, and you will be the better for it. With regard to the little impostor at your house, James and I, with the unconcern of innocence, had her for an evening, and we ascertained, sir, that she was quite safe—quite safe. I do not object, however, to showing any kindness to her. There, sir," he added, taking a few gold pieces from his pocket, and rolling them up in one of the notes Mr. Ford had put on the table, "you may give her that, with Captain George's love."

He laid both the gold and note in which it was wrapped, on the table before Mr. Ford. Perhaps Mr. Ford ought to have pocketed the money, and remembered that both gold and notes were Mab's, but he did not; the insolent tone, the sneer, put him beside himself; he tore the note open, and, taking out the gold, he deliberately flung it in Captain George's face.

"Take that, and the curse of an honest man, whom you have made a rogue, along with it!" he said with foaming lips.

Captain George was no coward, but he could keep his temper under control, and his resentment now took no active shape. He darted a bitter look at Mr. Ford, and he shook his trembling forefinger at him. But he said not one word. In silence, too, Mr. Ford turned away, left the room, walked downstairs, and let himself out into the quiet street lit by a calm moon and shining stars.

CHAPTER XVI.

SUSAN saw Mr. Ford leaving his wife's room. She was struck with his wild and haggard looks, and entered her mistress's apartment unsummoned. She found Mrs. Ford sitting up in her bed, and looking strangely excited.

"Send me Robert," she said; "send me Mab—be quick, lose no time, Susan.

Susan obeyed, and in a few minutes Mab and Robert stood by the sick lady's bed.

She took their cool young hands within her own hot and burning ones, and looked pitifully at them both.

"Robert," she said, "you know poor little Mab's story—she is alone, friendless, and forsaken—be true to her, be very kind to her, Robert."

"I will," sturdily answered Robert. "I am kind to her, and I teach her all I know."

"You like Nelly best," said Mab, pouting.

"No, I don't, you ninny, I like you best. But Nelly is like a stranger here, and that is why I am attentive to her."

"But you will be kind, very kind to little Mab," said his mother again. "Oh! do, Robert, for your sake, for the sake of your brothers."

"I will be kind to her," sententially said Robert.

Mrs. Ford sighed deeply. She had done all she could do. She had committed a child to the care and kindness of a child, and there ended her power.

"Leave the room," she said to Robert; "but first put Mab upon my bed, and now leave the room."

Robert did as he was bid, not without some wonder. Still more amazed was Mab, to find herself hoisted up on the high white bed, and seated there face to face with that cold, haughty Mrs. Ford, of whom she had always stood in awe, and whose tardy kindness could not conciliate her childish heart. The door closed on Robert, and these two remained alone, the child and Mr. Ford's wife.

"Mab, Mab!" she said, in a voice full of pathos; "poor little Mab! how unkind I have been to you; but forgive me—I am going to die. Forgive me, Mab."

"Do not! do not!" cried Mab, frightened.

"Forgive me, and forgive my dear children," still pleaded Mrs. Ford.

Mab stared, without answering.

"Say it softly after me," whispered Mrs. Ford. "Say this: 'Dear Lord Jesus, forgive me, as I forgive them, for they are innocent.'"

"Let me go!" cried Mab; "let me go!"

"Hush, darling, hush!" said Mrs. Ford, detaining her. "Only say it after me, it is so easy; say it after me."

But terror had entered Mab's heart. Mrs. Ford's pale face and burning eyes, her broken, impressive accents, had undone the object she wished to attain. With a wild scream, Mab attempted to break from her, and, being unable to do so, she sank back on the bed in a fit. Mrs. Ford had no need to summon assistance—Susan and Miss Ford entered the room at one moment.

"Take her away," said Mrs. Ford, sinking back on her pillow, with a sigh of despair. "I only frightened her; she would not forgive them."

No one understood her meaning. Mab herself, when she was removed out of the room, and soothed out of her strange

terror, could give no distinct account of what had passed, nor of what had caused it. There was not much time to mind or question her. Susan and Miss Ford exchanged looks as they watched Mrs. Ford's pale face. The emotions of that day had been too much; death was stealing over that troubled countenance, and with death, peace, repose, resignation. Meekly folded were the clasped hands, serenely parted were the pale lips, soft was the look of the dying blue eyes.

"To Thy keeping, dear Lord—to Thy keeping," she whispered. "Thou wilt watch, Thou wilt care for them. To Thy keeping I leave them."

There came still a greater change.

"It is all over," said Susan, awestruck. She bent over her mistress, and started to hear her saying, "Be kind to the child."

These were the last words that bore a meaning; some other disconnected sentences she uttered. Then came the great struggle; the battle which life ever loses. And now it is all over. Close the eyes, compose the limbs, it is all over—never again, in this world, shall Mr. Ford and his wife meet.

Where did he spend that night, which brought an event long expected, yet sudden in its coming? No one ever knew. It was grey morning when he let himself in, stole upstairs, and entered the room where his dead wife lay. Was he shocked, amazed, or merely grieved? No one could tell.

The day was well worn, and he had not come out; and not a sound had given a token of life from the room of death. No one ventured to go near him.

"I can't, miss—I can't," sobbed Susan, in answer to Miss Lavinia's request—"I know he has made away with himself, I know he has, and I can't go in."

"I shall go and tap at the door," faltered Miss Lavinia, trembling violently. She went and knocked gently, but got no answer.

"John!" she called, "John, speak to me, for God's sake!"

But the adjuration, though repeated, was fruitless. Miss Lavinia came back to the parlour, pale as a ghost, and shaking in every limb.

"I cannot imagine what has happened," she stammered; "I knocked, I called, and could get no answer. We must send one of the children."

But the three boys, who were crying together in a corner of the parlour, would not go. To entreaties and arguments Robert returned a sullen "no," and William and Ned, more honestly

confessed "they were afraid." Mab, who sat dressing her doll, seemingly the only unconcerned one midst the general grief, here looked up, and said, promptly, "I'll go, aunty."

She rose as she spoke. Miss Lavinia was a little surprised.

"And why will you go?" she asked.

"I know uncle has had no breakfast," said Mab, her face working with emotion; "and I shall tell him to come down and eat."

No one opposed her project, and up Mab went. She knocked at the door, and got no reply; but either Mab did not know the nature of death, or it had no terror for her, for, opening the door, she walked in. At first she did not see Mr. Ford. A second look showed him to her.

He was lying on the bed near his wife. His arm was thrown over her; his face was laid on her pillow, and he was moaning—dreadfully moaning.

"Alicia, Alicia—I loved you—I loved you!"

Sad lament of a wrecked heart, poured forth to the dull ear of the dead. He did not hear the little footsteps falling on the floor, he scarcely felt the childish hands that clasped his, but he heard the soft, tearful voice that said imploringly,

"Don't, uncle, don't."

Perhaps the paroxysm of his grief was out, perhaps there was something in her young, innocent touch, in her fond, little voice that moved him. He rose, and looked at her—the light eyes, the fair hair seemed Alicia's, but Alicia's when she was fond and loving. His heart swelled within him.

"I have wronged her," he thought, "perhaps *she* will love me." He clasped the child in his arm—he wept freely, abundantly; she cried, child-like, out of sympathy, and from that hour there was a bond of love between the wronger and the wronged one.

"It will atone," he murmured, glancing at the marble face on the pillow; "it will atone, Alicia."

PART II.

MR. FORD'S SON.

CHAPTER I.

TEN years had gone by.

They had told on Miss Lavinia. She was fifty, grey and wrinkled. These ten years had not been years of pleasure to her. She had had a house to keep on very little money—an irritable brother to please—a wayward girl to rear, and boys' clothes to mend. But Miss Lavinia was of a meek, contented disposition. It had not been all sunshine, she was obliged to confess, but then Providence had willed it so, and what Providence had willed must needs be right. Dear Robert had been very kind, and little Mab was very good at heart, and John meant well, and the boys were good boys, and she had had a home where she could almost do as she pleased, and all was as it should be.

But this satisfied spirit all at once forsook Miss Lavinia, on a bright summer afternoon. Many things had annoyed her. Robert had gone out without bidding her a good morning. Mab had been pettish—the boys had laughed at her—and she and Mr. Ford had fallen out over the accounts.

This was a frequent source of contest between them. Mr. Ford was much altered, and not improved in temper. The once reckless and prodigal man had become sober, stingy, and mean. He fretted over what he considered Miss Lavinia's reckless expenditure, he teased her night and morning about economy, he denied the boys the simplest things though he raised no objection

to their being provided by Robert ; to Mab alone he was liberal, not extravagantly, but sufficiently ; but with his sister he carried on a perpetual warfare, of which that source of all evil, money was the root.

Miss Lavinia could have borne better with it, had she not felt some doubt of what her brother daily asserted—that he was a poor man. The world said the very reverse ; the world declared that Mr. Ford was more than well-off—that he was rich, very rich—that everything he touched turned into gold ; and Miss Lavinia, who had a natural leaning towards the opinion of the majority, thought the world must be right. True, her brother wore his garments threadbare, and denied himself every comfort—luxury was out of the question. “But that is the way of misers,” reasoned Miss Lavinia, “and I am afraid, I really am, that John, who used to be extravagant, and, at least, generous, has turned, miserly. I dare say it is grief for the death of his wife, poor fellow ! I wonder, though, he never mentions her.”

For never, since the day when Alicia Norton had been laid in her grave, had the widower uttered her name. It had been pronounced in his presence by Susan, by his sister, and his children, but he had heard them with a rigid countenance, and had betrayed no sign of emotion. Little by little, and as time passed, Mrs. Ford had ceased to be remembered, or at, least, mentioned, and her husband had not sought to renew the subject. She had slept neglected, and, seemingly, forgotten in her grave. A plain stone, with initials, marking the spot, weeds and rank grass taking the place of memorial flowers.

“I cannot make out master, I cannot,” was Susan’s indignant comment, when she came home from her first visit to the cemetery ; “that master, who used to dote on missus so, should allow her poor grave to go wild in that fashion—it is a shame, there, and I shall tell him so.”

But Susan did not. She felt certain that Mr. Ford never once visited his wife’s last resting-place ; she even noticed that he had her portrait, a crayon sketch, removed from the drawing-room, and he caused to be put away many little tokens that might have reminded him of her being—but Susan did not speak. She vaguely acknowledged a grief different from, and, probably, far deeper, than her own. She guessed a wound hopelessly hidden in his very heart ; a sorrow nothing could soothe, and much could waken into bitter life. Only one thing she knew and could vouch for, Mr. Ford had tenderly loved his wife, and she supposed that, after his own fashion, he mourned for her.

This Miss Lavinia never doubted; all that surprised her was his fondness and extraordinary partiality for Mab. He had his own children, and Robert was a pattern young man, but none of them seemed so near him as the little foundling. "Now, that is not just," argued Miss Lavinia; "Mab is a good girl, but she is not equal to Robert—besides, she is not his own child; but since he is not just to me, his own sister, how can I expect him to be just to his own son? I wish, though, he would let me have more money, I really cannot do it on thirty shillings a week. I must tell him so."

Miss Lavinia had already told him so that morning, and in vain, but she had a patient obstinacy, which repulses could not weary, and as her brother, at that precise moment, entered the front parlour, where she was sitting, she took the opportunity to speak.

Ten years had told on Mr. Ford too, and that in more ways than one. His hair was white as snow, and fell in waves around his face. The expression of his countenance was completely altered; his look was keen and shy, his lips were rigidly compressed, he stooped more than ever; but his step was firmer than of yore; purpose was written in his whole aspect, purpose, and, to a close observer, sorrow, corroding and sure: one of those griefs which the strong only master after fierce struggles, and against which the weak contend in vain.

"Livy, are you alone?" he asked, looking keenly around him.

"Yes, John, I am alone. I wanted——"

"Yes, Livy, I have no doubt you wanted," was the sharp reply, "when are you not wanting? And I, too, want, Livy. I want to speak to you, and about Robert, too. You will ruin the boy if you go on so. I have just seen fine doings in the kitchen. A steak for Robert, and for Robert only. What is the meaning of it?"

Miss Lavinia was habitually truthful, but escape, save by partial untruth, was impossible, so she said firmly, internally resolving to do what she declared as done:

"I paid for that steak, John. And, John," she added, rousing herself the more readily to attack that defence was difficult, "I have thought about it again, and I really cannot keep house for eight on thirty shillings a week."

"There is a way to do everything," sharply replied Mr. Ford, "and I am afraid, I really am, Livy, you are not a good manager. That steak does not look like good management, and I cannot

help thinking you could make the thirty shillings do if you would lay in a stock."

"Out of thirty shillings a week, John!"

"Why do you not do as I do?" he persisted. "I buy coals cheap——"

"It does not make much difference, for we are half starved," interrupted Miss Lavinia.

"I buy coals cheap, and other things can be managed in the same way."

"But I cannot buy meat beforehand."

"Indeed, Livy, you can, and you ought to cure your own beef; and since you will be such a prodigal as to drink beer, why do you not brew your own beer?"

"Brew my own beer!"

"Well, no," said Mr. Ford, hesitatingly, "you would be extravagant, I fear; but, at all events, I really think you might grow a few vegetables in that garden of ours."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Miss Lavinia, whose mind at once pictured plots of cabbages and ridges of potatoes.

"Now, scarlet runners are both useful and ornamental," persisted Mr. Ford; "they are gay to look at when in blossom, and really nice to eat; but you have no economy, that is the truth of it. You really have none, Livy. Now, what did you do with those thirty-five pounds I returned to you ten years ago—spent them foolishly, I have no doubt, in steaks for Robert and so on, and if you had left them to me they would have brought in capital interest."

"John, I cannot keep house on thirty shillings a week," despondently persisted Miss Lavinia.

"Not if you give Robert steaks, and the boys tea, and rashers of bacon, and hot suppers, of course not. No, Miss Lavinia, good housekeeping and economy cannot go on so. Milk and water and plenty of bread will do for the boys, and tea for Mab and you. You may also have some slight luncheon; you are not young, and Mab is growing. Then a good plain joint for dinner, hot one day, cold the next, a dish of greens or potatoes and suet dumplings, but no fal-lals, or kickshaws and dainties; tea and a slice of bread and butter will do afterwards, and what more is wanted?"

"But how am I to provide that out of thirty shillings a week?" said Miss Ford.

"How?"

"Yes, John how?"

"What is the price of bread?"

"Sevenpence the quartern loaf."

"And what do you give for meat?"

"I pay ninepence, but of course——"

"Ninepence; well, then, Livy, here it is: twelve loaves a week, seven shillings, and twenty pounds of meat, fifteen; seven and fifteen are twenty-two, the extra eight shillings will do amply for beer, vegetables, &c!"

Miss Lavinia looked bewildered at this mathematical division of the thirty shillings, and despondently replied, "It would not do."

"It must do," doggedly said her brother—"I am a poor man, Livy, and I can afford no more."

He left the room as he spoke.

The word "must" always calmed Miss Lavinia. Since the thirty shillings must do, why, there was no more to be said or thought about it. She dived down to the bottom of her work-basket for a pair of socks, and, after unfolding them, began meditating on a problem which many mothers and aunts have found perplexing: "Why, and how is it, young people will wear out so fast."

"I wonder they will," thought Miss Lavinia; "I suppose it is the depravity of human nature."

"They," in this case, meant her two younger nephews, William and Edward; for Robert, who really was more careful, as he was older than his brothers, was never included in any of Miss Lavinia's "theys."

Robert was kind and respectful to his aunt, and the quiet regard of her nephew was the treasure of Miss Ford's life. John was odd, Mab was a good girl, but there was a daring strength in her character, of which Miss Lavinia stood in awe; William and Edward liked her, but in a boyish way, and shrewd, though timid and nervous, Miss Lavinia knew that in a boyish way, too, they quizzed her. But dear Robert was ever attentive and kind. He handed her her chair at dinner; helped her to choice bits when he carved, and paid her every one of those little attentions, which, as women find in the decline of life, drop away with youth as roses from the tree with summer time. No wonder, then, that Miss Lavinia's eyes sparkled as they rested on Robert with fondness and pride. He was so handsome, so good, so superior. He was Robert her darling; his faults were virtues, his good qualities matchless perfections. The love of a whole life was bestowed on Robert; a love

tempered with humility—for what, save that love, had the giver to bestow? It was all his goodness to care about her. This condescension made him all the loftier a being in her eyes. Robert, his fine person, his talents, his manner of expressing himself, ay, even his hundred a year, in Mr. George's office, were endless themes with Miss Lavinia. "And he earns a hundred a year," was one of her conclusions, when she had been descanting on the perfections of her favourite. No wonder, therefore, that, from the sinning "they" of Edward and William, she now wandered to the irreproachable "him" of Robert, and, again looking at the socks, internally exclaimed, "How unlike him!"

"Is uncle here?" said a pleasant voice.

Miss Lavinia looked up, and saw Mab's head in at the door.

Mab, too, was altered since we saw her last. The child of six had become the girl of sixteen, and wonderful was the change. Mab was neither beautiful nor pretty, she was that something beyond both, for which there is no name. She had golden hair and a radiant face. Brightness was her prevailing aspect. Life, light, and joy played and moved around her. Few could see her and not smile with pleasurable emotion. She had fine grey eyes, and a pure complexion, but her features, though not unpleasing, were irregular; her charm was the charm of the morning, the charm ever fresh and new of light and gladness.

"Come in," said Miss Ford, smiling at the young girl's bright face, "I want to speak to you."

"And I want uncle," said Mab, without entering.

"And I wish you would speak to your uncle," despondingly said Miss Lavinia; "he is upstairs. He is really not reasonable. He wants me to keep house on thirty shillings a week, and I can't. Do calculate it with him, Mab, and prove to him that his twelve loaves a week, and his twenty pounds of meat, will never do for eight people."

"I can't let you have more than two pounds a week, aunt," decisively said Mab.

"I should be very glad of two pounds."

"Then you shall have them, aunt."

The door closed, and the bright face vanished.

CHAPTER II.

"We do not want a drawing-room now," had said Mr. Ford, a few days after his wife's funeral.

Accordingly, part of the drawing-room furniture was removed to the parlours and bed-rooms; and Mr. Ford kept for his own use, as more retired and secluded, the rooms which had been his wife's. They were almost bare, but they pleased him so. The whole man was altered, as his family soon found.

They saw something, but not all. Mr. Ford had been weak, dogmatic, self-confident. Something of all that he was still; but with a wide difference; he had learned to doubt his own integrity, and the change that doubt wrought was fearful. The very foundations of his moral world were irremediably shaken. Right and wrong were still clear to him, but he knew that his power to do one, and to resist the other was weak. Repentance had come indeed, but not the power of atonement. It is hard to retrace the path of duty when we once have swerved from it. Turn which way he might, that fair and open path of truth and justice receded from before John Ford. His life was one of daily lies, acted or spoken. He could confess the truth about Mab to none; it might have been dangerous, and was assuredly useless. His children, Mab herself, grew up in the belief that she was living upon their substance and his charity; it galled him, yet he could not help it. Especially bitter was the deception when he had to receive Mab's gratitude and affection. Her caresses felt like fire, her fondness was a torment.

"Oh, if she knew!" he thought; "if she knew!"

From thoughts so bitter he found but one refuge, the acquisition of money. He could not restore Mab to her name and wealth, but he could earn and save money for her. Money had caused her misfortune and his error—money should be the atonement. With feverish ardour he set about his task; twice within ten years he had reached affluence and twice ruin had overtaken him; and now, nothing discouraged, he was bent on a third venture: hence the economy against which poor Miss Lavinia contended in vain.

On leaving that lady, Mab lightly ran upstairs, tapped at the back drawing-room door—Mr. Ford's sitting room—and, without waiting for an answer, entered with the familiarity of one who was always welcome. Mr. Ford was sitting before a table in the window; on hearing her he turned round hastily, and at

the same time spread his hands in evident alarm over a heap on the table, and Mab saw with amazement that it was a heap of gold and banknotes.

"You should not come in so," he said agitatedly, "you should not, Mab. It is not right."

Mab did not reply.

"Now you will go and tell Lavinia. I am a rich man," he continued, speaking with much irritation, "and I am not; and I have been refusing her money, and I will not give her more than thirty shillings a-week—it must do."

"It cannot do," replied Mab, decisively.

"Well, then, I cannot help it."

"Oh! uncle! and all that money."

"It is not mine, child, it is not mine. It is left in trust with me, and I cannot spend a farthing of it."

"Well, then, I suppose we must starve," coolly said Mab. "It is no use, uncle, thirty shillings cannot do."

Mr. Ford looked helpless and piteous.

"You do not know what you are doing," he groaned, "you do not, Mab—you are robbing Peter to pay Paul."

"Uncle, we cannot live on less than two pounds a-week."

"Two pounds!"

"Yes, uncle; the boys are hearty, and——"

"And I am going to be eaten out of house and home by the boys!" almost screamed Mr. Ford. "Does not Robert earn? Do they not earn?——"

"Oh! uncle! how can you be so unjust! Why, dear Robert almost keeps the boys—it is I, uncle, who am the burden of the family."

Mr. Ford looked at her rather wildly.

"Mab, I cannot do it," he said imploringly, "I cannot, Mab."

But Mab was pitiless. She went up to Mr. Ford, and whilst she twined one arm around his neck, she menacingly stretched out the other toward the heap on the table. But instead of a displeased frown, Mr. Ford gave her an approving smile.

"Do," he said, "do—take the notes and feel how crisp they are. Eh! Mab! And the gold! There is nothing like it, is there, Mab?—and it will be all yours one day, my little Queen Mab. Why, you will be quite a rich woman yet, only, do not tell them so."

"Then the money is yours, uncle," promptly said Mab.

"No, child, it is not, but you see it is in trust, and I manage

it, and, of course, I have a sort of right over it, and you shall have it—only do not take it now, Mab—do not.”

“Why so?” she said, taking a sovereign and gaily tossing it up and catching it again in the palm of her little hand.

“Oh! Mab!” he said pitifully, “be careful of the money—you do not know the toil, the anxiety, the care, every one of these jingling pieces has cost me. And then when it went all—as it did twice—Mab, I thought I should go mad—I thought I should.”

Mab dropped the gold she held, and untwining her arm from Mr. Ford’s neck, she said,

“Oh! uncle! how can you be so fond of money?”

“Fond of money!” he groaned; “I hate, I abhor, I detest it—it has been the curse of my life—but you see this money is not mine,” he added, calming down and gathering it up to put away; “so I must be careful of it.”

“Uncle, you must give me ten shillings.”

“Must I?”

“Indeed you must.”

“Well, then, here is a sovereign, and let it do two weeks—you understand, Mab.”

Mab nodded.

“And will you have any money for yourself?” asked Mr. Ford, lingering over a five-pound note.

“For myself alone!” said Mab.

“To be sure.”

“No, uncle. I do not care about money—I have no use for it—and since you are so fond of it,” she compassionately added, “you had better keep it.”

“And so, Mab, you wish for nothing.”

“Oh! yes, I do—but where is the use—I cannot have my wish.”

Mr. Ford saw with concern that her face was clouded, and that her bright eyes were dim.

“What is it?—tell me—you shall have your wish.”

Mab shook her head.

“It is no use, uncle—money cannot give it me—not even all the heap you had there a while ago,” she added, casting a look of philosophic pity at the drawer of his bureau; “no, I want things beyond the reach of money.”

“I cannot guess riddles, child,” a little impatiently said Mr. Ford; “and I wish you would not talk so loud about heaps of money—you know if you tell Lavinia what you saw——”

"Don't be afraid," said Mab, with the same lofty compassion. "I know better; but, uncle, you have said it—you cannot guess riddles, and it is just a riddle troubles me—I wish," she continued, looking at him sadly, "I wish, uncle, I knew how old I am."

Mr. Ford gave a start. Mab pursued:

"You cannot imagine how it annoys me. I really think I am older than I look. Some guess me at seventeen; perhaps, I am, uncle, what do you think?"

"You have been ten years with us," stammered Mr. Ford.

"And that is all you know," continued Mab; "I suppose I cannot have been ten when I was left at your door—eh! uncle? Then I am afraid I am only sixteen or so; and yet, uncle, I feel so old—sometimes, so dreadfully old!"

Mr. Ford looked very uneasy. He always looked so when Mab touched on this matter; and Mab, who had concluded in her own mind that it was because the time of her coming to his house reminded him of his wife's death, rarely alluded to the unwelcome subject. She saw how painful an impression she had produced, and, with a forgetfulness of self which was her redeeming trait, and her prevailing virtue, she left him, went to the harmonium in the next room, opened it, and began playing one of Mozart's most divine pieces.

Mab had early shown great musical taste, and Mr. Ford, careless about his own children, had cultivated it at some expense and with much zeal. Mab had received lessons from the best masters, and had made great progress. She excelled in religious music, and Mrs. Ford's harmonium was her favourite instrument. Mr. Ford's saddest or most irritable moods yielded to the charm of her playing; and now, though still moved with the reminiscences Mab had unconsciously called up, he paused in the act of closing his bureau to listen to her.

"It is amazing what an ear I have for music," said Mr. Ford. "I know nothing about it; but I have a wonderful ear. Poor William puts me out horribly with his fiddle—my ear is too correct, you see, Mab. What are you playing?"

"An Agnus Dei, uncle."

The instrument was a fine one, and Mab had both power and skill to waken it into life. The "Agnus Dei" was one of Mozart's most tender and plaintive laments, an appeal of sinning and suffering humanity to the God of all mercy; and Mab gave it infinite pathos.

Mr. Ford listened, and gazed intently at Mab's face as it

rose above the instrument. That bright girlish countenance, which in everyday life expressed archness and good-humour, became grave and almost sublime under the power of music. To Mr. Ford's diseased and excited mind, Mab looked like the avenging angel who closed the gates of paradise on our first parents.

"Hush!" he said, with an abrupt motion of his hand, "don't tell me God forgives sinners—I tell you, Mab, some sins are never forgiven."

"Poor uncle," softly said Mab, looking at him with deep pity, for religious doubt and melancholy were amongst the sorrows of Mr. Ford's new life. Since his wife's death he had surrendered to his sister the religious education of his children. He did not believe in repentance, he had no faith in forgiveness; the gates of mercy were closed upon him—he said it, he felt it. No one could argue him out of it—Mab could produce a momentary impression, but even she could do no more.

"Poor uncle," she said again, "I am so sorry for you!"

But Mr. Ford's despair had already given way to other feelings.

"You will not tell them about the money," he said, nervously.

"No, uncle, I shall not," answered Mab, without showing any surprise.

She was accustomed to these abrupt changes. She knew, too, that he no longer wanted her, and, closing the instrument, she softly left the room. Once she was on the staircase, however, she gaily ran down with her prize to Miss Lavinia, who, on seeing the money, breathed a sigh of relief.

"But shall we always get it?" she asked, doubtfully.

"I shall see to that," replied Mab.

As she spoke three young faces passed by the parlour window, nodding at her.

"There they are!" she cried, and she ran and opened the door for them.

Edward, a fresh-coloured lad of seventeen, entered first: then came William, languid and delicate; then Robert, now twenty-three, fair, tall, and handsome, and grave enough for thirty. Mab allowed the two younger brothers to enter the parlour, and looked up demurely in Robert's face. He smiled sedately, softly stroked her hair, and said, "What news?"

"None—only ——"

"Only what?"

"I don't know my lesson."

"Mab!"

"Yes, I knew it was very wrong, but don't scold, Robert, don't."

Robert hung up his hat, and seemed to think about it.

"And don't look sulky," persisted Mab.

"Mab," he said again.

"Well, Robert, it is no use to be cross. I hate ethics—they upset me."

"Because your mind is not well balanced," replied Robert, coolly. "We will talk it over after dinner."

Mab looked provoked, but her displeasures were always short-lived, and this faded as rapidly from her sunny face as it had appeared there. Besides, the hall was not the spot for a discussion on the merit of ethics; so, letting Robert enter the parlour, Mab followed him in. At once William and Edward took hold of her. They had brought home a comic album, and wanted to test its efficacy on Mab. "Do look!" and "Just see this one!" "No, look at this, Mab!" were the exclamations which rose from the corner of the sofa, where their two brown heads, and Mab's fair hair, were bending together over the volume. Mab's clear, girlish laughter answered them with a sound which many would have found pleasant. But it made Miss Lavinia look nervous, and Robert, who had taken a chair near her, annoyed.

"Don't be foolish, Mab," he said, a little impatiently.

"I am not," she replied, with a saucy toss of her head; "I am very wise; I am practising the philosophy of Democritus."

Robert leaned back in his chair, and looked superior to such trifling. Miss Lavinia seemed hurt that her favourite should be answered so lightly.

"My dear, I wish you would be steadier," she said, "you are seventeen; it is quite time to give up nonsense."

Youth has an extraordinary gift for mirth. The word "nonsense" upset the gravity of William and Edward, and they both burst out laughing. They laughed until they were tired, but Mab did not join in their merriment. She saw that Robert looked gloomy, and that tears stood in Miss Lavinia's eyes. She put the offending album away, rose, and, going to her aunt, said softly,

"Aunt, is it time for dinner? Shall I go and tell Susan to do Robert's steak?"

The homely question, put in Mab's sweetest tones, and with

her most winning look, was probably meant and felt as an attempt at conciliation, for Miss Lavinia brightened, and Robert's brow relaxed.

"No, my dear, stay with Robert," replied kind Miss Ford, who knew that Mab's society was more acceptable than her own to her elder nephew, and she rose and left the room with unselfish alacrity.

Mab sat down in the chair her aunt had vacated, and took up a sock from the work-basket.

"Oh! do come and look, Mab," said Edward.

"Stay here, Mab," authoritatively observed Robert; and Mab, who had half risen, sat down again, not without a little sigh of regret. "You know, Mab," he added, in a more gracious tone, "that you are my property."

"So I perceive," answered Mab, half pleased and half provoked.

But the exercise of power, sweet to us all, was particularly sweet to Robert. He knew, however, how to clothe the iron hand in the silken glove, and, by a few kind words, rather tenderly whispered in Mab's ear, he restored her to a seeming of good humour. But seeming it was, for Mab was meditating either escape or revolt, when Susan's sister, Lucy, opening the parlour door, gave her the means for the former.

"Please, miss," she said, addressing Mab, "the old captain has been and come down the area steps, and he is in the kitchen frightening Miss Ford to death, and he will not go away without seeing master."

"I shall go and tell uncle," readily said Mab; for since Mr. Ford had grown so irritable and strange, Mab alone was privileged to disturb him, and intrude on his privacy.

Upstairs she went again. William, who had followed her out, overtook her on the first floor landing. William had bad health, and he had been nursed by Mab through several illnesses, since which he had remained her pet. He it was who asked of her what both he and Edward wanted; for Mab was a sort of prime minister in the house. She stood between Mr. Ford's displeasure and his younger sons, and through her flowed his scanty good graces. Thus she was invariably applied to by William and Edward, and even by Miss Lavinia. Robert alone asked and received nothing through her means. There existed between him and his father a line of separation, which Mab vainly endeavoured to break, and for which he was too proud to seek her influence. But his brothers were not troubled with

such superfluous pride, and it was to get something through Mab's means that William now followed her.

"Well, what is it now?" asked Mab, turning round, with a half smile; "I warn you I have got money out of uncle to-day, and can ask for no more."

"We don't want money," answered William; "but I wish you would ask papa to let us have Fred here. You remember Frederick Norton. He arrived to-day—we saw him—such a good fellow he is! We want to have him here."

Mab looked startled. It seemed a stretch of her influence to trouble Mr. Ford with a guest.

"I cannot," she said. "No, William, I really cannot."

"Yes—you can if you please—you will like Fred so—do, Mab, now there is a good girl."

Still Mab hesitated; but William, who, spite his languid, careless looks, knew how to press a point, urged this until Mab promised.

"And now let me go," she added, breaking from him, "aunt wants to get rid of Captain George, I am sure."

This time Mab tapped at the back drawing-room door, a ready "come in" at once gave her a right to enter. She found Mr. Ford deep in accounts, but he looked up from his books with a smile on seeing her.

"Well, my dear, what is it now?" he asked; "is dinner ready?"

"No—not quite, and yet you are wanted below, uncle."

Mab looked like one who has unpleasant news to give, and who knows not in what words to give them. Mr. Ford's countenance became troubled.

"Is Captain George below?" he asked nervously.

"He is in the kitchen with Aunt Lavinia. He went down the area steps. Uncle, what does that man always come here for?"

"God knows," groaned Mr. Ford—"for my sins, I believe. Go down, Mab, and tell him I cannot see him—bid him leave the house."

"I am afraid of him," said Mab, with a frightened look, "he is so dirty and so tipsy, uncle. I would not mind giving him money, if I had it, for he is poor, I believe, but he disgusts me."

"Give him money!" wrathfully cried Mr. Ford, "the thief, the robber, the swindler—not a farthing to save him from starvation—not one, Mab!"

Mab, who had a very moderate liking for Captain George, raised no demur to this harsh sentence, but she asked what was to be done.

"Why does he not go to his brother?" indignantly exclaimed Mr. Ford; "his brother is rich, is he not? Why does he not go to him?"

"Do not trouble about him, uncle," said Mab, "I shall dismiss Captain George, but I have something else to say to you. Frederick Norton has arrived from Australia."

"I know it; I saw him to day."

"And when is he coming?" asked Mab coolly.

"When?"

"Yes, when is he coming to stay here, I mean?"

"I will not have him!" cried Mr. Ford; "I will not, Mab—do not try that."

"But, uncle, if William were to go to Australia, as he talks of doing, where would you expect him to go, unless to Mr. Norton's. Then, of course, Frederick must come here."

"And why should William go to Australia?" angrily asked Mr. Ford; "it is his brother Robert has put that into his head. Just as he told you to ask me to have Frederick here."

"No, uncle, he did not—but I am sorry I mentioned it, I see you do not like it; and now I must dismiss Captain George, must I?"

She turned to the door, but Mr. Ford recalled her with a sigh.

"Stay, child," he said; "why should that man so much as look at you?—I shall go—I shall go."

He went, and Mab followed him slowly.

As they reached the hall they both heard Captain George's whining voice below, holding argument with Miss Lavinia.

"I made his fortune," said the Captain, "and look at my reward!—I made John Ford's fortune, let him deny it if he can—and look at him, and look at me, Miss Ford."

Mr. Ford ground his teeth and shook his fist in the air, and muttered something Mab could not hear; but he went down the kitchen stairs, and if he dismissed Captain George, he did so quietly, though briefly, for Mab's hand was still on the parlour door, when the Captain's step, rendered shuffling by a pair of old slippers, was heard coming up. She entered hastily, but the Captain had heard her, for almost as soon as the door had closed upon her, it opened again, and his head and shoulders appeared in the opening. Time had not improved the Captain.

His eyes were watery, his nose was swollen and red, his moustache shabby, and his once brilliant teeth were almost all gone. He leered round the room and gave a longing look at the table now laid for dinner ; but with something of the graceful courtesy of old times, he waved his hand to Mab, and, without noticing the haughty looks of Robert, who stood with his back to the fireplace, or the defiant glances of Edward and William, he said :

"Mrs. George sends her love, my dear. You remember Mrs. George."

Before Mab could reply, Captain George suddenly vanished, and his half-angry exclamation : "Now, Ford, that's too bad !" followed by his rapid exit at the front door, showed that this sudden disappearance was not entirely effected by Captain George's own free will.

CHAPTER III.

MR. FORD entered the parlour with a flushed and angry face. The first person he saw was Robert, still standing with his back to the fireplace, and to him his wrath was at once directed.

"Who has been talking to Captain George in the kitchen ?" he asked, staring angrily at his eldest son.

"I have," composedly replied Robert.

"And what business have you to be talking to that vagabond. He did not ask for you, I suppose ?"

"He did not," still very calmly answered Robert, "and I certainly had no business with him, but he frightened my aunt, who appealed to me for protection—I went down and gave it, that is all. Captain George having promised to be quiet, I left him."

Mr. Ford growled something between his teeth, thrust his hands into his pockets, and walked up and down the room in a fit of smothered passion. Robert took up a newspaper, and neither looked nor spoke. William and Edward pulled long faces at each other, and exchanged winks ; and Mab, watching Mr. Ford, patiently waited her opportunity to interpose a gentle, conciliating word, a task of love and peace which she unweariedly renewed day after day, though ever in vain. She did not know, she could not suspect, that she was the cause of the ever-widening breach between father and son. Ever since his wife's death Mr. Ford was morally certain that Robert was in possession of his secret. He could not tax him with a word, not even with a look of disrespect, yet he was certain he had

not his esteem, and the thought rankled in his heart. For whom had he sinned? For Alicia, who had died reproaching and contemning him; for his children, for Robert, who neither loved nor respected him; for William and Edward, whom Robert had estranged from him, over whom he assumed, as he exercised, the power and the care of a father.

An embittered heart is rarely just. Mr. Ford forgot that if Robert took much on himself, it was because his own neglect had been great. He forgot that if he had loved his children, he had not always shown that love; especially did he forget that to know his sad error could be no sin in his eldest son, though it might be a misfortune. With the perversity of a great sorrow, he widened the breach already so deep, by exaggerated coldness and severity. He stung Robert by his injustice, he alienated William and Edward by his harsh temper, and no one suspected that tenderness and jealousy were at the root of his harshness; least of all, that he was secretly proud of the son he he was ever censuring. Miss Lavinia herself did not glory more in Robert's steadiness, sobriety, and sterling qualities, than did his seemingly harsh and unjust father.

"Are we going to get any dinner to-day?" angrily asked Mr. Ford, stopping suddenly short in the middle of the room.

He looked around him like one ready to quarrel, but his eye fell on Mab, who stood patiently waiting his return to a more peaceful mood, and it softened at once; he seemed ashamed of his roughness, and coughed gently by way of prelude to a better humour.

"What was it you were saying about Frederick Norton, pussy?" he asked, stretching out his arm to draw her to his side.

Mab laughed, and nestling her head on his shoulder, softly stroked his cheek.

"Oh! you want him here, do you!" continued Mr. Ford, pinching her ear. "You and he used to be great friends; well, we shall see—we shall see; and now let us have dinner," he added, as the door opened and Miss Lavinia, followed by Lucy, entered the parlour.

The meal began. From her place by Mr. Ford, Mab glanced over at William, who smiled approval in his languid way; but she saw with concern that disapprobation, stern and strong, sat on Robert's straight, inflexible forehead. He evidently would not for one enjoy Frederick's presence in the house. Mab had not thought that he might not approve this plan, and, with some

trepidation, she anticipated a lecture. In the meanwhile, Mr. Ford, determined to gratify his darling, prepared Miss Lavinia for her guest.

"Young Norton has come, Livy," he said to her, "I suppose we have a spare bed to give him?"

Miss Ford's knife and fork dropped on her plate at the suggestion. The bed was nothing, but to board a ravenous boy of twenty-one, without any increase to the two pounds a week, was not to be thought of.

"We have a spare bed," she said, faintly, "but—"

"Never mind about the rest," hastily interrupted Mr. Ford, who knew well enough what was coming; "when there's enough for eight there's enough for nine, and you are not going to make any difference for a young fellow who has been accustomed to roughing it in the bush and the diggings. I shall see him this evening, and tell him that his room will be ready to-morrow. You need not wait for tea for me, Livy."

So saying, and without giving Miss Ford time to demur, Mr. Ford rose from the table, and hastily left the room.

"Never mind, aunt," whispered Mab to Miss Lavinia, who sat a picture of dismay, "I shall manage about the money."

"I shall be glad to speak to you in the back parlour, Mab," solemnly said Robert.

"I must first go up to my room and water my plants," replied Mab.

"Very well."

He said this in the tone of a judge who agrees to delay an impending execution, but whose utmost kindness cannot possibly go beyond delay; and to show Mab that escape was impossible, he took up the newspaper and entered the back parlour, closing the door behind him, to read it there alone. At once Mab rose, and, going out by the other door, ran up to her room. Miss Lavinia remained alone with her two younger nephews. William languidly stretched himself on the sofa, and Edward beat the tune of "I'm afloat" on the window panes.

"I wish Mab had stayed," said William, "one never enjoys her unless when our brother Robert is out of the room."

"I wonder he does not put her in a cage!" indignantly said Edward.

Miss Lavinia gave each of the speakers as angry a look as the mildness of her nature allowed, but it fell harmless on William's shield of laziness, and Edward's high spirits were armour proof against looks. Moreover, neither was conscious of wrong.

They did not care about their father; they cared but little for Miss Lavinia; they were fond and proud of Mab; devotedly attached to each other; and they looked up to Robert with a mixture of admiration and fear. They relied upon him in difficulties, but they grew silent when he was by, and were happiest in his absence. This feeling they unreservedly displayed in Miss Lavinia's presence—for, first of all, she was of no account, and, secondly, she would never betray them.

"I wish Mab had stayed," again said William. "Let us go and see Fred."

"Robert won't like it," replied Edward, evidently enjoying it all the more; "he can't bear Fred."

"Robert hates every one who contradicts him," said William, slowly.

"And Fred has a spirit of his own."

"Yes, but Robert was in the right, Ned."

"What about it?" warmly replied Ned; "Fred could not go back of what he had said; a man must stand by what he says—but Robert is domineering."

"I am surprised," indignantly began Miss Lavinia; but, before she could get through the rest, a "Come on" of Edward had roused the languid William.

They left the room, where Miss Lavinia remained alone in the growing twilight—alone with her indignation at their ingratitude to dear Robert.

"And I believe he is coming to me," she thought, as she heard him rise in the next room; but Robert had only got up to ring the bell, and all he said, when Lucy answered it, was,

"Ask Miss Mab to come down, if you please;" for strict politeness to servants was one of Robert's good qualities.

"So like him!" admiringly thought Miss Ford, and admiration of his perfections made her forget her solitude; "but Mab ought really to know better than to keep dear Robert waiting."

No doubt Mab ought to have known better; but Mab was in her room—a small but bright apartment, a little girlish world framed in by white curtains, where Mab found it very pleasant to sit and dream alone. It was a pleasant place. Books, flowers, and birds showed Mab's tastes. The perfect neatness of everything around did credit to the habits of order and care Miss Lavinia had inculcated on her adopted niece. In this sanctuary were spent Mab's happiest hours; to it she retreated whenever the mood of reverie, a frequent one, came on.

It was on her now. Through the open window she saw the

summits of trees and a clear blue sky ; the backs of other houses, and the chimney-tops, which were also included in her prospect, Mab ignored. She was at the happy age when the eye sees only that which the mind delights in. Just now it pleased her to let the book she was reading drop on her lap, and to lose herself in a sunlit forest, and to wander alone in its green and silent paths.

For some days past there had awakened in Mab vague yearnings towards unknown spots, often blending with remembrances, still more vague, of other places. Now, there arose a scene before her, one which she was sure she had beheld, when or where she knew not, but in that past which had preceded her arrival in Queen Square. It was a spot where three roads met, all overarched with stately trees that scarcely allowed a ray of sun to pierce their boughs, and that rarely opened their heavy foliage to let in a glimpse of sky. She sat on the last step of an old stone cross, defaced with age, and in her lap was a heap of wild-flowers, white daisies, tipped with red, buttercups, violets, and many more—a plenteous store.

So far the picture was so distinct, that Mab felt as if she could have painted it : the rest was confusion and mystery ; there was a wild sound and a great terror, and she wakened in the arms of a stranger, who said, "She is not hurt." And the stranger was that "he" about whom Robert had so often taunted and questioned her—and that was all.

"I wonder I never thought of it before," thought Mab ; and then followed another question, one which always jarred with pride, "Who and what was she ?"

But on this subject Mab would not and did not linger ; it was too bitter. She knit her smooth forehead into a frown, rebellious and indignant, and took up her book once more.

She was a great reader. And reading, which had taught her much, had made her dogmatic and modest. She had strong opinions, but she kept them to herself ; ardent feelings, but no one suspected them, perhaps because she was not selfish ; and that with an excellent opinion of her person and understanding, she thought very little about either. Mr. Ford's tenderness she never abused, Miss Lavinia's partiality for Robert she never resented, and Robert's assumption of superior knowledge and authority she submitted to good-humouredly. So they were all pleased, Mab was happy. At the same time, Mab now and then took a fancy to live for herself, to dream alone, to read the books she liked, and to have her own way. Her own way she would have this evening ; and, though Robert was waiting below, Mab,

after watering her plants, indulged in a reverie, and now coolly took up the life of Napoleon she was reading, and which she commented on as she read ;

"Robert may say what he likes," thought Mab, "there never was so grand a creature as Napoleon Bonaparte—never!"

For there was war between Robert and Mab; part of his tuition she had received with ardour, part she had tacitly rejected. Robert wanted his rosy, smiling pupil to be a Robert Ford in petticoats, and Mab wanted to be Mab, and no more. Whilst he resented her idleness, as he called it, Robert was, in reality, blind to the real groundwork of Mab's education and character—daring thought. He imagined her, femininely, averse to study, and he did not perceive in her the phenomenon which is daily getting less rare—the clear, vigorous mind and firm temper clothed in the graceful form of the girl. That open brow, those smiling eyes and dimpled cheeks, concealed many a bold speculation, the result of study, reading, and secret meditation. Mab might object to the ethics, and to many of the "ologies" Robert patronized—not that he loved them, but because the world around him did, for she was sincere, and only studied what she liked—but, in reality, she knew far more than did Robert, with all his fancied superiority; and what she knew, she knew, too, far better than he did. She was not without a certain consciousness of this, and, perhaps, it helped to make her rebellious.

Yet, when Lucy came, and knocked at her door, with Robert's message, Mab did not hesitate one moment, but went down at once. For, after all, he was Robert, her teacher, her friend, her more than brother—Robert, whom she was bound to obey, revere, and love.

She found Robert walking restlessly up and down the back parlour. He stopped short on seeing her. Mab was struck with his look, and exclaimed,

"Robert, something has happened!"

"Yes," he answered, trying to laugh, "something has happened; for I sent for you, and I am going out, and we can have no lesson, not even on ethics."

"Never mind," replied Mab, "it will do to-morrow."

"Yes, but do not leave me yet," said Robert; "I want to talk to you."

"Oh, don't scold!" implored Mab, looking alarmed, and thinking of Frederick.

"About what?" graciously answered Robert, who, though much displeased, had wisely resolved to keep his displeasure to

himself. "Sit down," he added. Mab obeyed. Robert sat down facing her, but without looking at her. He began:

"Mab, you are now seventeen."

"I believe I am."

"Has anyone ever offered marriage to you?"

He raised his eyes suddenly to her as he spoke. Mab blushed a little, and answered,

"Never mind."

Robert rose, and seemed almost excited.

"Mab," he said, "do not jest—this is no jesting matter. You are young, inexperienced, and can rely on no one's advice or judgment save mine. I may have put an ill-timed question with regard to the past, but, for the future, I must warn you. Mab, I am your best friend; and you must promise me that, until you are some years older, you will not listen to any proposal of marriage."

"He wants me for himself," thought Mab; "but why does he not say so?"

"Mab, you do not promise."

Mab's rosy mouth became very grave, and very demurely she said,

"I promise it, Robert."

"Well, but don't go away," he said, in high good humour, "I have something more to say to you."

"Oh! I hope he is not going to make love to me *now*," thought Mab. She liked Robert to be her admirer, and to feel uneasy and even jealous, but she did not want the actual love-making just yet. But Robert, whatever he might intend for the future, had no such thought for the present.

"Do you think William is looking well?" he asked. "I thought he was pale to-day."

"Indeed no, Robert. William has looked very well since his last illness."

Robert's face cleared, then clouded again.

"Poor lad!" he exclaimed, "if I could only push him on, and Neddy too, I should be free—you understand, Mab? But there are times when I do not know what to do with the boys. They cannot stay as they are, shabby clerks—can they, Mab?"

"Robert, I must be honest with you. I love them dearly; they are good, warm-hearted young men, but really I do not think them superior."

"Oh! you do not," said Robert, much nettled, and speaking

with very unloverlike sharpness; "and pray what can you know about it?"

"I certainly ought to know better than to disagree with you about your darling brothers," good humouredly replied Mab.

"Their being my brothers has nothing to do with it," shortly said Robert; "I see them as impartially as if they were strangers. You may smile, Queen Mab, it is so. I am sure my family feelings have nothing to do with my opinion of those two boys. I should think just the same of them if they were any one else's brothers."

As Robert was evidently excited, Mab would not contradict him by word or look, but remained listening patiently.

"And I say this," continued Robert warmly, "that William will make as fine a fellow as a brother need be proud of. Only, what can I do for him?"

"Good old Robert," said Mab, gently stroking his arm.

"And there is Neddy," continued Robert, musing, "not so intelligent as William, but so honest, so steady, such sense, with his high spirits. Mab, he would make a great merchant—one of those men who rise to anything, whose word is better than the bond of other men—only where is the first start?"

Mab shook her head and looked grave.

"And what can I do for them?" exclaimed Robert, with an impatient sigh; "nothing—I do nothing."

"Why, Robert, you do everything for them," warmly answered Mab. "You stint yourself for them. You deny yourself a long holiday to take a short one with them. Why you are not a brother—you are a father to them."

But vanity is a strange passion. Robert had his share of it; he was weakly vain of his precocious steadiness; he assumed more gravity than he really felt, more knowledge than he really possessed, but was neither proud nor vain of the daily sacrifices he made for his young brothers. These flowed without effort from the fulness of his heart, and he kept no reckoning of them.

"No, I do nothing," said Robert again, "and all my talk and all my plans end, as this conversation is going to end, in nothing. Time alone can help us all. Eh! Mab."

Mab understood his meaning now. He could not ask her to marry him; he wanted time, and in the meanwhile she was to marry no one else. Mab could not help being amused at the transparency of his plans, and she had a vague consciousness that Frederick Norton's presence in the house might have caused this declaration; but she kept her surmises to herself, and, as

Robert's look was watching her face for a reply, she said demurely enough, "that time alone could do it." With this answer Robert seemed quite satisfied. He looked at his watch, saw it was time to go and keep his appointment with his employer, Mr. James George; and, bidding Mab a good evening, he left her.

CHAPTER IV.

LITTLE did Mab suspect on what errand Robert had left the house. The scheme he had been maturing years was now, he thought, drawing to a close, and, with some of his father's temper, he had no doubt of success. In all that was practical and straightforward, Robert was a man of business. Mr. James George often said of him, "That young Ford will be rich; he will be rich, sir." But there is a higher and other wisdom than that which is needed to make money, and in that Robert failed. He was a better judge of event and circumstance than of the human heart. Affection blinded him with his brothers, and self-esteem with himself. He had almost unlimited confidence in his own powers of achieving his own ends. The silent fear in which his father held him, Mab's gratitude, Miss Lavinia's adoration, the respect of his brothers, and the careful regard of his employer, Mr. James George, all combined to impress Robert with the conviction that he was destined to be a successful man. And being young and inexperienced, and sanguine, he forgot that success has her limits.

His heart had for years been set on a project in which Mab unconsciously held the first part. By dint of thought, by connecting many little broken links of the one chain, he knew as well as Mr. Ford who and what she was. He knew why she had been left at his father's door, with five hundred pounds; and whom that father, unconsciously at first, with full and guilty knowledge in the end, had abetted. Ay, Mab was rich, in right at least; she was dead to the world, and the two Georges had divided her inheritance; but if by one it had been rapidly squandered, carefully had the other hoarded his share.

Mr. James George was a wealthy man, and if gold was his ruling passion, disgrace was also the ruling fear of his life. It was that fear that made him choose the weak Mr. Ford for an accomplice; it was that fear which had made him take Mr. Ford's eldest son into his office; and it was that fear still which had made him keep the young man, whom he secretly feared

and hated ; for Robert, though careful, had not kept his secret so well that Mr. George did not know it. Mr. George indeed knew that he was proof against detection, but no one is proof against suspicion. Now, though his name was not good, though it was connected with some strange transactions, yet, as he had slipped through them, as he still stood his ground, he clung to his fragment of reputation, such as it was. He clung to it with a desperate tenacity, which was the foundation of Robert's secret hopes ; for on that, and on that alone, he could work.

Robert was ambitious for himself and his brothers ; he saw no harm in deriving benefit from his father's great error, and in Mab he hoped to find the girl he liked, and the fortune he required. The double motive acted powerfully on a narrow, but tenacious mind. Robert loved Mab, but he loved her as the gardener loves the plant his care and labour have fostered into being—for its value first, next for its beauty. She was precisely, as he thought, the girl he ought to marry, on her own merits ; but he also thought that she would be rich one day, and, without that conviction, Robert would never have loved her. These two convictions, that Mab was the very person who ought to become Mrs. Robert Ford, and that she would bring wealth to her husband, had blended so long and so closely in Robert's mind, that he himself could have given them no separate and distinct existence. To do him justice, he did not strive to do so ; his was not an analytic mind ; he loved her, and she would be rich—this much he knew, or thought he knew, and he sought for no more.

As he left Queen Square and walked slowly towards Oxford Street, Robert, who had a business appointment with Mr. James George in his private residence, at Bayswater, meditated how best he could manage to turn that interview to his own purpose.

"It must be done some time or other," he thought, "and it shall be done this evening. Mab is growing up. I will not wait any longer."

The young man was absorbed in these thoughts, but not so much so as not to perceive, with some surprise, that his father and Captain George were walking slowly before him. He was now in Bloomsbury Square, and it was quiet and lonely on that mild summer evening. There was no mistaking his father's stooping back, and Captain George's erect though most shabbily clothed figure. They suddenly came to a stand-still near the railings, and Robert, reluctant to pass them, stood still also.

"Make it ten shillings more," urged Captain George. "Remember how down-hill you were when the little thing sat at your door——"

"Say that again!" excitedly interrupted Mr. Ford's voice—"say that again!"

"Come, come, old fellow, we'll drop it. You are better, at least, than that shabby James, who will not give his own brother one shilling. But he'll quake for it yet, he will."

Something else Captain George added, but his words were lost in a resentful growl, and the pair walking on turned into a neighbouring street and vanished.

Robert went on his way, trying to make out something of what he had heard—something especially which he might turn to account that evening; but though he weighed the matter carefully, nothing came of it, and, wearied of the fruitless exertion, he dismissed it utterly from his mind.

It was dusk when he reached Mr. James George's house, one of the quietest and most sober-looking houses in Bayswater, by no means the house of a wealthy man.

Robert had never seen it before, for his intercourse with his employer was of the most limited nature; he scanned it with a curious and approving eye: so much the better that Mr. George was saving, that he was not extravagant and reckless like the spendthrift he had just seen; so much the better for Mab in the end. But for the present how tenacious a hold this saving spoke of Mr. George's ill-gotten wealth!

A demure-looking footman answered Robert's double knock. In the gaslit hall behind him appeared a woman of thirty-five or so, fair and freckled, with auburn hair, and with a pale worn face, that might have been pretty once, and the saddest look Robert had ever seen. She wore a black silk dress that had seen better days, and her cap had the same look of decayed smartness.

"Mr. George," said Robert, "I come by appointment."

"I know, sir," answered the woman, who seemed to be an upper servant or housekeeper; "this way, please."

She shewed him into a plain parlour, where sat Mr. George, surrounded by papers and books.

Mr. George had altered little during the last ten years. He was still a cold, grey, respectable looking man, but some lines in his face had deepened, and to a close observer they would not have seemed pleasant lines. There was a more covetous eagerness than of yore in the small grey eyes, veiled by the heavy and

drooping lids; there was more will in the thin lips, and the fearfulness of the retreating chin was, at least, no less than it had been. But will ruled all. It is said that Frederick the Great was constitutionally a coward, but will made him brave and a great commander. Mr. George's temperament would have kept him from daring actions, but avidity and will ruled fear, and made him venture—rarely, it is true, but often enough for danger. Peril, however, Mr. George did not apprehend now, as the door opened and let in his clerk.

"Good evening to you, Ford," said Mr. George with a certain lofty kindness; "sit down here, Ford."

There are few of us without some characteristic manner or other: Mr. George's was pomposity. He was born lofty, dignified, and patronizing, and he never lost an opportunity of displaying those attributes.

"Now, Ford," he said, as Robert took a chair and prepared for business, "I will just give you an instance of human nature. It may be useful to you in your future career. You know, Ford, how I favoured young Slater. Well, Ford, he turned against me—he has turned against me—and I am compelled to ask you to come here and help me with this extra work—deplorable, is it not, Ford, deplorable?"

Robert was accustomed to such language. He said it was deplorable, and he looked at the papers, but Mr. George seemed in no hurry to begin.

"Now, could anything be fairer than my conduct?" he exclaimed with a sigh. "Young Slater wanted increase of salary. I felt disposed to favour him, but not just then; I told him so. 'Not now, Slater,' I said, 'not now; but you know how I love to encourage rising merit, you know it, Slater. Well, then, there is Ford, who is above you, speak to him next Michaelmas; ask *him* to sound *me*, and then we shall see—then we shall see, Slater.' Now I put it to you, Ford, could anything be more fair, more candid; I will venture to add, more amiable? I actually forgot my own rank and position to advise my junior clerk to his own benefit. And now the ungrateful little vagabond, instead of waiting till next Michaelmas to ask you to sound *me*, goes off with himself, and leaves us all this extra trouble."

Robert looked up in his employer's face and said quietly enough:

"I suppose he got a good offer. His salary was but small."

Mr. George coughed and looked alarmed, but he said nothing.

"I was thinking," pursued Robert, "of asking you to raise my salary, sir. I am your only clerk now, and there is much work."

Mr. George did not refer Robert to some third person to sound him: he said sharply, and without taking any amiable views of the matter:

"Out of the question, Ford, out of the question. There are the papers. Let us go to work."

"I should like three hundred," coolly said Robert; "and with your recommendation I might help my two brothers to better berths than they have; I see, sir, you are but little inclined to favour me in this; but I am twenty-three, and I wish to marry, which I cannot do on a hundred a year."

Mr. George tightened his lips, and looked wary, but he said not one word.

"Or, perhaps," continued Robert, "it would make no difference to you to settle the amount on my future wife, Miss Winter. I should like that just as well."

Mr. George's hand shook a little as he scribbled with the pen he held, but he said calmly enough:

"Let's see about these papers first. After tea, Ford, after tea we will talk of your salary."

"We might manage it another way yet," pursued Robert; "you might make a will in favour of Miss Winter—or, if you liked it better, settle part of your property on her."

Mr. George put down his pen and looked at Robert, and his look might mean anything. It might mean the cool disdain of an upright man, or the steady insolence of a guilty one. Robert, by no means daunted, continued:

"Ten years ago Miss Winter was left at my father's door. Suppose she was then entitled to fifteen thousand pounds, which have been lying by since then. It is after all but a small part of your fortune, and the world knows your integrity, sir, there need be no unpleasant doubts either before or after your death. Miss Winter is probably the daughter of a friend or of a relative—the matter is one that defies scrutiny, and leaves your fair name untouched."

Still Mr. George did not reply. The blow that was falling on him had been expected for years, and Mr. George was in some measure prepared for this attack. Yet though he knew himself invulnerable in law, and almost invulnerable in opinion, he was too cautious to answer his audacious clerk without first maturing the matter.

"After tea," he said again, "after tea."

He pushed the papers to Robert, and, as if nothing had occurred, both went into the matter in hand, and worked amicably together. At eight Mr. George rang for tea.

To Robert's surprise, a little girl of ten or eleven, rather pretty, though she bore an unmistakable likeness to Mr. George, came in, and behind her the sad-looking woman whom he had already seen. This person, whom Mr. George addressed as Mrs. Smith, made the tea. She was evidently an upper housekeeper.

The child, Miss Blanche Redmond, called Mr. George "guardian," and sat next him. He looked at her with a worshipping fondness that contrasted with the asperity of his tone when he addressed Mrs. Smith. That melancholy-looking person filled Robert with pity. She was nervous, awkward, and committed blunder after blunder. In her agitation she spilled the tea she was pouring out. Little Blanche laughed and said pertly :

"How stupid you are, Mrs. Smith !"

Mr. George gave the unfortunate Mrs. Smith a withering look.

"I think you are not well, Mrs. Smith," he said austere-ly ;
"I think you had better go to your room."

"And I'll pour out the tea," cried Blanche, starting to her feet with great alacrity. "I like it."

"Mind you do not scald yourself, my dear," timidly said Mrs. Smith, rising to go.

Mr. George's breath seemed gone at the familiarity of the address.

"Mrs. Smith !" he cried—"you amaze me, you amaze me, Mrs. Smith !"

"Ay," thought Robert, "she has called her own child, my dear." And he almost forgot the interest he had at stake in watching this domestic scene.

"Pour out the tea, my love," said Mr. George to the child ; and in a less severe tone he added, "You may go, Mrs. Smith."

Mrs. Smith looked piteously at her master, then at the little girl who had already taken her place. She pressed her hand to her heart, as if she felt some strange pain there ; then, not heeding Robert's compassionate look, she noiselessly left the room.

Blanche was in great glee at her new duties. She poured out the tea into the sugar basin ; she mixed the cups, and did not know which was which ; she transferred the contents of the slop-basin to Mr. George's cup, and Mr. George laughed with a low

chuckle, he had not a word of reproof, and, to all appearance, too, he had not a care, nor a thought on his mind.

Tea was over, the child had left, and Mr. George and his clerk were alone once more with the papers.

"And now, with regard to what we were saying," said Mr. George, entering at once on the matter, "here is my answer: the young lady you have just seen is my sole heiress. I will raise your salary fifty pounds and take no junior clerk; and the next time you mention to me the name of the young lady you wish to marry, I shall dismiss you on the spot."

Robert raised his eyes; they exchanged looks of mutual mistrust and defiance, but both felt that for the present there was no more to be done, and there the matter ended. At ten the business that had brought him was over, and Robert took his leave.

His thoughts as he walked home were bitter. He had not expected so complete a defeat of his ambitious hopes. He had laid a sure train, as he thought; for who better than he knew Mr. George's timorous sense of disgrace? The three hundred pounds salary was a mere blind to lead Mr. George to Robert's great object, the ultimate restoration of Mr. George's share of Mab's property. There he thought he was sure of him; for this plan combined everything—Mr. George's dislike of present expense, his hatred of his spendthrift brother, and his fear of leaving a disgraced name instead of that plausible reputation he had been at so much trouble to build up for himself. But he was supported, too, by a motive which Robert, who only knew that his employer was a childless widower, had never suspected; and the links which the young man had thought of iron were mere cobwebs to Mr. George's subtler mind. There was no proof against him, or Robert would at once have used it; all his proposals, therefore, were mere words, empty threats he could afford to defy, ay, and if need be, he could cast him off and dare him to do his worst. Still, it was better not to do that. Robert was worth a hundred and fifty pounds a year; the salary he earned was, Mr. George thought, a fair bribe for his silence. "Let him talk, if he dare!" so cogitated Mr. George during tea-time; and after tea-time he spoke, and his words and his looks alike warned Robert that this resolve was final.

"And shall it end thus?" thought Robert as he walked home. "Shall Mr. George's secret bring me in nothing but a hundred and fifty pounds a year—of my own earning, too?"

He turned the matter again and again, and could find no

present issue favourable to his wishes. Ay, Mr. George was indeed invulnerable, and he knew it; but there was time yet, and as he entered Bloomsbury Square a sudden hope passed through Robert's mind. He remembered Captain George, dirty, shabby, needy, and embittered against his wealthy brother. Could he help, could he assist Robert in securing the immediate prize—one, too, that need not wait for Mr. George's death or good pleasure. The thought was too much for Robert's strength. He walked about the square restless, excited, and trembling like a criminal, till midnight struck. Then, feeling somewhat calmer, he proceeded to Queen Square. He found Miss Lavinia patiently sitting up for him.

"I am sorry, aunt, to have kept you waiting," kindly said Robert; "but Mr. George and I had to despatch a world of business. I came home as quickly as I could, for I knew you would sit up."

"Dear Robert, you are always so considerate," said Miss Lavinia, quite happy. And "dear Robert," who was accustomed to make his aunt happy at this cheap rate, smiled and went to bed with a peaceful countenance.

CHAPTER V.

ROBERT came down early the next morning. He had spent a sleepless night, meditating over his failure, and maturing his plans. He expected the parlour to be vacant, and he was surprised to find his father there before him.

Mr. Ford was sitting by the window reading the newspaper; he glanced up from its columns as Robert entered the room: and there was something strange and mistrustful in the looks father and son exchanged. Robert was wondering what could have passed between his father and Captain George after they went away together, and Mr. Ford, who on coming home had seen his eldest son walking about Bloomsbury Square in a state of much excitement, and a full hour before he entered the house, was perplexed to imagine what could have thus agitated the staid and sober Robert.

"You came home late last night," said Mr. Ford.

"Yes," answered Robert, calmly. "Mr. George kept me till half-past eleven. It must have been twelve when I got here."

Mr. Ford rubbed his chin, and looked meditatively at Rob-

ert. His son was not untruthful by habit, though he was plausible by nature. What made him tell that untruth now? There must be a motive. Robert, absorbed in his own desire to know something about Captain George, did not notice his father's bent brows and searching looks. He put on a careless air, whistled a while, then said negligently,

"Any news?"

"Funds flat," replied Mr. Ford.

"By-the-bye, what does that old captain do now?" exclaimed Robert suddenly, as if that moment only he had remembered the captain's existence; "nothing, I suppose," he added, as his father did not answer him.

"What old captain?" asked Mr. Ford, who had not been able to repress a slight start.

"Oh! that old fellow—George—Georgey—who was here last night."

Mr. Ford gave another slight start—a very slight one, almost imperceptible. On it followed a dull, vacant look, well assumed, if it were not real—a look which had often come over his face of late.

"I am sure I don't know," he said slowly—"something or other, I daresay;" and, taking up his newspaper, he read once more.

It was no use asking him where Captain George lived; yet that it was which Robert wanted to ascertain.

"Perhaps Aunt Lavinia knows," thought the young man.

He left the parlour, took a turn in the garden, then quietly walked upstairs to a housekeeper's room, which Miss Lavinia possessed, in the upper part of the house, and where she was to be found almost every morning before breakfast.

The door stood ajar, and through the opening Robert could see within.

Sunshine filled the small bright room; the morning breeze stirred the white curtains of the open window, showing a background of green trees and blue sky, and Mab attired in a pink morning gown—the sun shining on her golden hair and bent face—sat on a hassock, writing down in a ledger on her knees the items announced by Miss Lavinia. The careful lady was surveying the shelves on which the remains of last year's jams and preserves stood in broken rows with many gaps between.

"Wanting raspberry-jam," said Miss Lavinia.

"It is down, aunt."

"And, Mab, do not forget putting down the pickled onions—you know how fond Robert is of them."

"Thank you, aunt," said Robert, entering, and he gratefully kissed Miss Lavinia's pale cheek.

He was always kind and civil, but he did not always kiss her. Poor Miss Lavinia!—her eyes glistened, and her cheeks became all rosy again as she received this caress from her darling nephew.

"Good morning, Mr. Robert Ford," demurely said Mab, looking up from her ledger, and speaking with a pen between her rosy lips.

She looked so pretty a mockery of all grave business, that Robert could not resist the temptation of stooping and kissing her too. Mab offered no resistance, but she mischievously whisked her pen so that its contents remained imprinted on Robert's cheek. She expected a solemn reproof at the least, for Robert was not fond of such jests—but no, Robert only shook his fore-finger at her, and wiped his cheek, whilst Mab laughed to her heart's content.

Miss Lavinia's heart swelled. God bless them both!—they were handsome and good, and how fond they were of each other!—ay, that was true, innocent love, if there was any upon earth. It looked like it at least.

Robert, after wiping his cheek, had taken hold of Mab's two hands and compelled her to put down the ledger, and Mab was struggling silently, but wilfully, to regain her freedom. Robert did his best not to laugh, and Mab, half-amused, half-vexed, was trying to frown at him.

"What a pair of children!" said Miss Lavinia, shaking her head, and her eyes glistening with secret pleasure. "Oh! Robert! Robert! what brought you up here to my housekeeper's room this morning?"

The question sobered Robert.

"Aunt," he said, releasing Mab's hands, "I hope that old captain did not come again whilst you were alone?"

"No, thank heaven!" warmly replied Miss Lavinia. "I do not know what I should have done."

"If I only knew where he lived," exclaimed Robert, "I would see and prevent him from troubling you again."

"Oh! he told me where he and Mrs. George are living now," innocently answered Miss Lavinia; "they reside in some abominable court about the Seven Dials, and I hope, my dear Robert, you will not go near him. I would not enter that low

neighbourhood on any account, and with your watch it would not be safe, it really would not. I should be frightened to death to think of your going on any such errand; and, indeed, I am very glad I have forgotten the rest of his direction, so now you cannot go."

Robert laughed.

"Thank you, aunt," he said. "Well, I am glad the old monster did not come again, and I shall now leave you to your pickled onions. Can you spare Mab? I should like to say a few words to her."

"Oh, yes; go, my dear, go with Robert at once," said Robert's over-yielding aunt. "I can do very well without you."

"But, aunt, how can you write?" demurred Mab, who liked a little housekeeping now and then, and who had her own pride in the ledger.

"Go, child. I tell you I can do without you."

Mab went, wondering what Robert would say to her—a matter that perplexed Robert too, as he had only asked her to come with him in order that neither she nor his aunt might suspect the real motive of his morning visit to the housekeeper's room.

A useless precaution. Captain George was too little in her thoughts for a glimmering of the truth to enter the slow mind of Miss Lavinia, or for even the more penetrating Mab to have any such suspicions.

"Aunt will miss me," a little impatiently said Mab, as they went downstairs.

"I am sorry for it," composedly replied Robert, "but you see I want you."

He pushed open, as he spoke, the door that led to the garden.

Much altered and much improved was the garden at the back of the house in Queen Square. It was no longer a sandy waste dreary to the eye, but a nest of gay flowers and bright green grass. Its improved condition was all owing to Robert, who, if he had many faults, poor fellow, had, amongst other excellent qualities, an innate love of order and neatness, in which his more generous-hearted father had always failed. It was chiefly, however, to please his aunt and Mab that he had made the garden what it was now. Ivy still covered the walls, but it was kept in careful order. Neither smoke nor dust was allowed to defile its glossy leaves and their delicate white veins. Robert did his duty with artificial showers produced from the spout of the watering-pot, and the neighbours whose windows overlooked this

little spot often saw Miss Lavinia doing hers on warm summer evenings, by dusting patiently the screen of verdure which hid the brown brick of the walls. Rows of bright flowers relieved the sombre green of the ivy. Scarlet geraniums, yellow calceolarias, red roses, shone there in all their splendour, and a neat edge of grass, sprinkled with daisies and buttercups, fenced them in from the shining gravel path. The jasmine arbour at the further end of this garden was in full bloom now, and nasturtiums and convolvuluses mingled with it. The old wooden bench had been replaced by a pretty rustic seat, and the very poplar trees that stood on either side of it had grown and improved and shot out new branches under Robert's fostering care. But the rockwork in the centre of the garden was Robert's master-piece.

The rockwork in itself was a wonder. It had taken three years of walks in the country and by the seashore to collect those curiously formed stones of which it was composed. Robert's own hands had cemented them with plaster, and now and then helped the vagaries of nature. Robert's ingenuity it was that had contrived those sly little hiding places, moist and deep, whence ferns peeped out with the most innocent and natural look in the world—those recesses for creeping plants that hung about, throwing their long graceful tendrils over every bit of rock, mingling and parting again in a gay, seemingly unsought-for, confusion, that was in reality the acme of the gardener's art. But if the rockwork was the wonder of the garden, the fountain was the wonder of the rockwork. All Robert's mechanical skill had been called forth to produce that tiny jet of water, nearly one foot high, which sprang in the air clear, silvery, and bright from the summit and centre of the rocky pyramid, and fell again with a pretty little splash into its tin basin. It had its drawbacks—what that is earthly has not such? It had a trick of ceasing suddenly, and giving up playing, just when Miss Lavinia was pointing it out to a visitor, and it thereby so far provoked this gentle lady that she once impatiently exclaimed, "It did it on purpose." Its other error, of going all off one side was more excusable, and was leniently forgiven by Robert's aunt, whose pride in this masterpiece of her nephew was unbounded. Every one in the house, indeed, was proud of it. Edward and William boasted of it in their respective offices. Mab spoke of it frankly, as an extraordinary contrivance; and even Mr. Ford, whilst he affected to deride, secretly admired this result of his eldest son's ingenuity.

To this garden, on this sweet and balmy summer morning, Robert now took Mab. He made her sit down on the bench, and, sitting down by her, he looked at the rock-work and the fountain, and wondered what he should say. Suddenly a bright thought struck him. He turned to her, and looking full in her face he remarked, with unusual abruptness,

"Mab, do not wonder at the question—I have a motive for it: has it ever occurred to you to wonder who and what you are?"

A cloud came over Mab's sunny face.

"Oh! Robert!" she said, "what a question!"

"I am sorry it troubles you," replied Robert, in the tone in which he would have said "I am glad," "but it is an important matter. Your unknown parents——"

"I have none," impetuously interrupted the young girl; "a mother would not have left her child so many years without one token of remembrance. Robert, when I was left at the door of this house ten years ago, I was utterly forsaken. I belong to none."

"You belong to us," said Robert kindly; he was calculating, but he was fond of Mab.

"I have received the deepest kindness," answered Mab; "God knows how grateful I am; but for all that I have neither kith nor kin."

"Mab, I wonder you remember no more of your childhood than you do."

"What would it avail if I did? Yesterday there came back to me a forest scene, an old stone cross——"

"That must have been abroad."

"Perhaps it was; I know I crossed the sea in a steamboat; but, as I was saying, I remember myself sitting at the foot of a stone cross; then comes a blot. And I see a dark lad, younger than Ned, and it is all over."

"And who is that lad?"

"There it is, Robert—who is *he*?"

Robert did not answer her. Even if Mrs. Smith was the Mary who had helped to betray poor Mab, what availed him the knowledge? She would never turn against the father of her child. She would never help to rob that child of its destined inheritance. Still, all knowledge is useful, and that might be turned to good account yet.

"Robert, what is the matter?" asked Mab. "Robert," she added, rising and speaking with sudden warmth, "have you learned anything about me? Speak, Robert, speak!"

"My dear Mab, how you do go on! How could I learn anything? I may be trying to learn, which is a very different thing; and now, just answer this other question, and I will tease you no more. Do you think the lady, as you call her, was your mother?"

"I am sure she was not. I remember another woman, very, very long ago, and she was my mother; but I cannot tell you what she was like. There is always a cloud on her face as it were, the cloud of my own oblivion. And now, Robert, this is all I know—tell me why you have questioned me?"

"Mab, I may be bent on a Quixotic errand, but I mean to try and discover who and what you are."

"You will fail, Robert."

"How do you know, Queen Mab?"

Mab's voice sank.

"Uncle has tried, Robert; he is trying, and he has failed, and you will fail too."

Robert had suspected as much, yet he seemed surprised, and asked on what Mab's belief rested.

"On his questions, on looks, and words, and broken speeches. I am sure he is trying, Robert—I am sure he has been trying these ten years."

Robert was sure of it too; suspicion became certainty, and certainty fired him. Ay, Mr. Ford was endeavouring to atone for the great wrong he had done Mab; he was trying to connect proofs and turn them into positive evidence. The vision dazzled Robert. What he had been attempting his father had been attempting too, but with far more chances of success than he had, for Mr. Ford knew well the story Robert only divined at. Where he, Robert, had failed, his father might succeed, and success was a fortune. That was why, then, he gave Captain George money, and still held intercourse with a man whom he despised and detested.

"Robert," said Mab, struck with his emotion, "what ails you?"

"Nothing," he answered, endeavouring to grow calm again, and fearing he had gone too far with Mab; "breakfast is ready, let us go in."

She stood up, and he followed her. As he passed by a rose-tree, Robert plucked the finest rose upon it, and put it in Mab's hair. She turned round with a surprised smile, for such attentions were not much in Robert's way. He looked down at her upraised face, and his look was secure, proud, and fond. She was pretty, she was good, and she would be rich.

"And I shall have her!" thought Robert.

The whole family was already seated round the breakfast-table when Mab and Robert entered the front parlour. Mab's rose at once attracted attention. Miss Lavinia nodded and smiled most significantly, and Mr. Ford asked, with some sharpness,

"Who has decorated you so, Mab?"

"I did," answered Robert, pouring himself out some coffee, "and I meant it as a token of the victory I won last evening over Mr. George's inexorable stinginess—my salary is raised fifty pounds."

William and Edward at once fixed eager looks on their elder brother; he shook his head sadly.

"No, poor boys," he said, "I tried to get something for you, but I failed. Mr. George knows of nothing that would suit you—so he says."

Edward, who enjoyed a salary of thirty pounds a year, looked gloomy; and even the more phlegmatic William took his breakfast in sullen, disappointed silence.

"Then, my dear Robert, you now have a salary of one hundred and fifty pounds a year!" exclaimed Miss Lavinia, full of fond admiration.

"I have, aunt, and I ought to have two hundred pounds, but Mr. George is all bent on economy. However, I am happy to have these extra fifty pounds. They will help me, I hope, to push on those two boys," he added, looking at his brothers.

"Dear Robert, just like him!" murmured Miss Lavinia, and even Mab looked kindly at Robert.

Mr. Ford said nothing. He went on drinking his tea, and wondering by what eloquence Robert had wrung the fifty pounds out of Mr. George. He was not far from guessing the truth, and the thoughts that suspicion suggested made him silent. Besides, he, too, had something to say, but he waited until his breakfast was over to say it. Pushing away his empty cup, he turned to his sister, and remarked carelessly,

"Livy, you have a carpet-bag you can lend me, have you not?"

"A carpet-bag!" repeated Miss Lavinia, much startled at so unexpected a question—"Yes, John, I have; but surely you are not going to travel?"

"Why not, Livy?"

"John, where are you going?" faltered Miss Lavinia.

The answer exceeded her wildest expectations.

"To America."

Miss Lavinia leaned back in her chair.

"My goodness!" was all she could say.

Mr. Ford did not heed her. He was looking at his children. For ten years he had not stirred from home. The boys had taken holidays; Mab and Miss Lavinia had twice gone to the seaside; but Mr. Ford had not left the house in Queen Square.

His sons, his sister, Mab herself felt convinced he remained at home out of that economy which had replaced his previous extravagance and become part of his character; but whatever his motive had been, he had remained, and now for the first time he spoke, not merely of ordinary travel, but of a long journey. He looked at his three sons, expecting, hoping to find signs of sorrow, or at least of concern in their faces. He saw none. He saw surprise, unequivocal and clear, but no regret. In all that family circle there was but one sad face—it was Mab's. Her cup stood half-full before her, her cheek rested on her hand, and her tears flowed silently, whilst her deep, earnest eyes were fixed full on his face. But though Mr. Ford saw this, it was not Mab he minded—not to her were directed those longing looks of his weary brown eyes, now soft as a woman's, and that implored in vain for some token of affectionate regret.

It is a strange feeling that parental love: a wonderful instinct—wonderful especially in its duration. What other love is there that passes not? This alone of all human feelings most resembles the divine tenderness of the Creator for his creatures, for it is patient, unwearied, and undying. Coldness, ingratitude can wound, but rarely destroy it. Its roots are in the very heart, and whilst that beats it lives; no virtue, no merit in man, but a perpetual miracle of God's goodness.

To all seeming, Mab was infinitely dearer to Mr. Ford than his own children; and yet she was not so. The love he bore her was the love of sorrow, repentance, and atonement. It sprang from the feeling that he could never do enough for one whom he had so wronged, and with it blended genuine tender-

ness and affection. But he loved his children, because they were his children—his real flesh and blood, born in sorrow, reared in adversity. William, Edward, and Robert were his boys—images of himself, part of his own being; for them he had sinned and suffered all these years, for them he would have died again and again. It smote his heart to see the coldness with which they could hear that he was leaving them for an unknown length of time, on a journey that might be dangerous. His lip quivered, his eyes grew dim, but he would not betray emotion which they did not share.

"Please to see about that carpet-bag, Livy," he said, and he rose and left the room.

CHAPTER VI.

A DEEP silence followed the closing of the parlour door. Miss Lavinia was still full of amazement, far too full to speak; Mab was crying; Robert was thinking, "He is going to America about Mab;" and Edward and William were exchanging glances of wonder and curiosity.

"What can papa be going to America for?" at length exclaimed Ned. No one answered this question.

"The governor looks a little cut up about it," slowly said William, who had more penetration and more feeling too than either of his brothers.

"What for?" petulantly exclaimed Edward. "I wish I could go to America; but there is no chance for me."

"I should prefer Australia," said William; "by far the newer country of the two, Neddy."

Neddy was fond of an argument, and this opportunity for one was not to be neglected.

"America is a democratic country," he said, warmly, "and I like republican institutions."

"Institutions fiddlestick," irreverently answered William; "can you tell me what an institution is? Just tell me that?"

Now, definition was not Edward's *forte*; he hesitated, and Mab, whose heart was very sore, and who felt no curiosity to hear the rest, rose and left the parlour. She went upstairs to go to her own room. As she passed the drawing-room door she saw that it was ajar, and conjecturing that Mr. Ford was within, she entered.

He was standing by one of the windows, looking out wistfully

in the square. Mab approached him, and he never turned round. Mr. Ford was looking at his three sons, on whom the front door had just closed, and who were walking away together laughing and talking.

"Uncle," softly said Mab, who guessed his feelings, and she passed her arm within his and looked up in his face.

"Let them go, Mab," he replied, without turning round; "let them go away talking and laughing, though they do not know whether they shall ever see their old father again."

"Uncle, are you going to-day?" cried Mab. "Oh! let me call them back." She wanted to open the window, but Mr. Ford held her fast.

"Hush!" he said, "call them back—what for? They are not children to hang about daddy, or cry because he is going! They are men, Mab; men grown up and ungrateful—men who do not want him, who have an elder brother that is more than a father to them! Provided the old man gives them board and lodging, they do not care where he is—in England or in America! What difference does it make to them! Do you think they will miss him! You cannot say you think it, Mab!"

Mab could not say she did; she felt mute and helpless.

"Oh! uncle, if they only knew how you love them!" she could not help saying.

"If they only knew it!" repeated Mr. Ford, shaking his white head; "if they only knew it! Am I not their father, Mab? Have I not well nigh sold my soul for these boys! and now they turn on me in my old age, when my hair is white as if I were eighty—they turn on me! Mab, never marry—never have children, Mab, to sting you with their ingratitude!"

"Uncle, they do love you, only you are often strict—"

"Say the word, Mab—I am harsh! To be sure, my life has not been cast on a bed of roses. I have had my trials—I have had a family to rear, and not always the wherewithal to do it; but I should be pleasant for all that. As to owing me any debt of gratitude, of course they do not! I have given them what shame, the world, the law itself compel every father to give his children—the shelter of his roof—a place at his table. Besides, of late Robert has paid full board, and Edward and William half. They owe me nothing, Mab, nothing—I keep a lodging-house, and they owe me nothing!"

Mr. Ford laughed as he said this, but it was a very dreary laugh, one that made Mab's heart ache. Anxious to change the subject, she leaned her head against his shoulder and said softly,

"Uncle, why are you going to America?"

Mr. Ford's brown eyes sparkled; a smile played around his sharp, irritable mouth; he drew Mab towards him, and kissed her fondly:

"It will end well for you, my pet," he said; "mind what I tell you, Mab, that journey will end well for you."

"But, uncle, what is it about?"

He smoothed her hair, and stroked her cheek, and called her "puss," but he would tell her no more. When she renewed her questions he gently put her away, and said with his abstracted look:

"I must see about that carpet-bag, child."

To see about the carpet-bag, proved, however, a more serious undertaking than Mr. Ford anticipated. Miss Lavinia's mind had by no means recovered the shock her brother's extraordinary declaration had given it at breakfast. She was still too much agitated to remember where the carpet-bag was, and moreover she tried hard to convince the impatient Mr. Ford that he had better buy one than have hers.

"There is a trunk-dealer in Little Ormond Street, John," she said in her earnest way; "and I believe he has American trunks, or at least trunks for the overland route, which is just the thing for you—whereas my carpet-bag was only meant for England."

"I am not going to India, Livy," testily replied Mr. Ford; "and where is the use of buying a new trunk when an old thing will do? Come now, exert yourself, will you, and look for it."

"I think you had better ask Mab," said Miss Lavinia, sitting down, as she always did in cases of utter despair; "I feel unequal to it."

Mab, on being summoned, at once said that Miss Lavinia's carpet-bag was in a trunk under the clothes-basket in one of the attics, a piece of intelligence which so far roused Miss Lavinia as to make her do her best to convince her brother that, since the bag was in the trunk under the clothes-basket, it was expedient to leave it there.

But Mr. Ford was resolved on extracting it from its hiding-place, and his vehement obstinacy prevailed over Miss Ford's passive stubbornness. The packing, however, proved another field of battle. Miss Lavinia, in her eagerness to relieve Mr. Ford of all travelling anxieties insisted on providing him with a hamper which she proposed filling with cold provisions.

"We had a joint yesterday, John," she said persuasively;

"and cold lamb makes excellent sandwiches, and boiled eggs are a fine thing for travelling; and I always heard that the charges on board steamers are dreadfully high; sixpence for a cup of such bad tea! Now, if you take my Etna and some naphtha, you can manage very well for yourself."

"Livy, *will* you let me have my shirts, if you please?" asked Mr. Ford with a desperate politeness which told of a coming storm; but still Miss Lavinia in her gentle obstinacy spoke of sandwiches and boiled eggs and the Etna, until Mr. Ford began to look wild, and Mab found it needful to interfere.

"Poor aunt is worried at your going, uncle," she said; "let me see about your linen—I know where it is kept; and let her have her way about the hamper," she whispered in his ear.

Mr. Ford muttered something which sounded very like an oath, though he had long given up swearing, and vowed with much emphasis, "that he would settle the hamper—he would! Let her attempt it—that was all."

Mab, bent on conciliation, found means to make Miss Lavinia leave the room on some pressing business below, and, remaining upstairs with Mr. Ford, she helped to pack the carpet-bag under his directions. His mood softened as he saw her thus engaged.

"Pack away, my darling," he said with sparkling eyes; "pack away. I am an old fox—they have not done with me yet—I have many a doubling they don't think of, Mab—ha, ha! They have laughed at old John Ford, have they?—well, we shall see!"

And, smacking his lips with the gusto of an epicure, Mr. Ford, whose hands were thrust into his pockets, with him a token of high good-humour, or of angry displeasure, began walking up and down his bedroom, where he and Mab were now alone. She was kneeling before the carpet-bag, with its future contents scattered on the floor around her. She looked up at Mr. Ford, surprised at his use of the word "they;" he could not be talking of his sons—of whom, then, was he speaking? But he did not heed her inquiring look; he was absorbed in his own thoughts, and still walking up and down the room with a firm and elastic step, he muttered, laughing and shaking his head; but all Mab heard or understood was: "I have got my teeth yet. And they shall feel them—they shall feel them!"

"Uncle," quietly asked Mab, "how much linen will you take?"

Mr. Ford was at once by her side, and his instructions were cool, clear, precise, and collected. In less than an hour the car-

pet-bag was packed to his entire satisfaction ; Lucy was sent for a cab, and he was ready to go.

"We shall see you on board, John," said Miss Lavinia.

John gave her a mistrustful look.

"I am not going on board," he said.

Miss Lavinia put only one construction on this speech : Mr. Ford intended going by rail to America ; she gave him a bewildered look, until Mab relieved and enlightened her by saying :

"Are you going by Liverpool, uncle ?"

"I don't know," he answered, almost as sharply as if he had spoken to his sister ; "I can go by Southampton if I like."

"Then we shall see you to the station, John," said Miss Lavinia.

The cab was at the door, and Mr. Ford was on his way down. He turned round with his hand on the heavy wooden banisters, and said coolly :

"You and Mab had better stay within. I can see it will rain this afternoon."

"Why, there is not a cloud, John, and the sun is shining."

"Dear aunt," softly whispered Mab, "let him go alone. He wishes it, you see."

"Good-bye, Mab," said Mr. Ford, stretching out his arm, and gathering her to his heart. "Good-bye, darling—you will think of the old man, eh ?"

Tears and kisses were Mab's only reply.

Good-bye, Livy," said Mr. Ford, holding out his hand to his sister ; "I have often been cross, I know, but I meant no harm—no harm, Livy."

"My dear John, you have been all goodness," said Miss Lavinia, much affected ; "and I hope and trust you will soon come home to us safe and well. I only wish," she timidly added, "you would let us see you on board."

She stopped short, for Mr. Ford's irascible lips began to twitch, preliminary to a wrathful reply, which Mab checked with a kiss.

"Good-bye, uncle darling ;" she said, trying to laugh and seem cheerful ; "make haste and go, or I shall get into the cab with you and be off to America."

"Tell the boys——" began Mr. Ford, but he checked himself.

"What ?" asked Mab.

"Nothing."

She questioned him in vain. The fond remembrance of the

father's heart was checked by the father's pride. He only shook his head when she spoke, and entered the cab without uttering another word.

Mab and Miss Lavinia stood on the door-step, and, with streaming eyes, watched the cab rolling away. Suddenly the door of the vehicle opened, and a dark object leaped out and bundled on the pavement; upon which the door was shut again, and the cabman, unconscious of what had happened, turned sharply the corner of the square.

"Good gracious!" faintly cried Miss Lavinia; "he has thrown it out. I told Lucy to put it in and he has thrown it out!"

It was the unfortunate hamper which Mr. Ford had thus violently expelled.

Miss Lavinia's next remark bore no reference to the hamper.

"I declare!" she exclaimed, "that John has gone away without leaving me a farthing of money."

She turned to Mab, but Mab had gone upstairs to cry in her room, and Miss Ford remained alone with her perplexity, wandering about the house and exclaiming, as she went, "What shall I do?"

Mr. Ford had been gone about a quarter of an hour, when the rattling of a cab was heard across Queen Square; it came nearer—it stopped at the door. Something had happened, Mr. Ford was coming back; before the cabman's knock had subsided at the door, Miss Lavinia had opened it herself, and breathlessly exclaimed,

"I am so glad, John! You forgot——"

She said no more: a stranger had alighted from the cab and stood before her.

"I am afraid Miss Ford has forgotten me," said the stranger with a smile.

He was young, good-looking, and he had dark hair, blue eyes, and very white teeth.

"I am afraid I have," stammered Miss Lavinia, who saw that the cab roof was covered with a formidable quantity of luggage.

"I am Frederick Norton," continued the stranger, "and I have come by Mr. Ford's invitation."

Miss Lavinia was mute: the extent of the calamity overcame her. Her brother was gone, a guest had come, and she had no money!

Frederick Norton reddened.

"I am afraid my arrival is ill-timed," he said; "perhaps I was not expected."

He looked very much inclined to get back into the cab ; but, delighted though Miss Lavinia would have been to see his visit end thus, she could not think of allowing it.

"Pray, come in, Mr. Norton," she cried eagerly ; and, conscious of the coldness of her welcome, she added, "And pray excuse me. My brother went off a few minutes ago to America, and we are still rather upset about it. If the cabman will help to put your luggage in the hall, I shall see about having it conveyed to your room presently."

Frederick Norton bowed. He felt there was something odd in all this, but he could not very well withdraw from the invitation so freely given and so freely accepted, the preceding evening. He saw his luggage transferred to the hall, he entered the parlour, and then exchanged a few words with Miss Lavinia. But quickly perceiving her perturbation of mind, he begged that she would take no further trouble about him, and that she would leave him, if, as he could not help suspecting, her presence were required elsewhere.

"I shall send Mab to you," eagerly said Miss Lavinia.

"I shall be delighted to renew my acquaintance with Miss Winter," answered Frederick Norton, smiling.

He took up a book, and Miss Lavinia hastened to leave the parlour.

In great distress she went up to Mab's room. The young girl's face was buried in the pillow of her bed. She had not heard the cab stopping at the door ; she did not hear Miss Lavinia entering her room, until that lady said, in a most melancholy tone of voice,

"My dear, what shall we do ? Young Mr. Norton has come to stay with us, and I have no room ready for him, and I have no money."

Mab raised her face still bathed in tears, and an expression of the deepest surprise passed over it.

"Young Mr. Norton has come, and I have no money," repeated Miss Lavinia ; "do you think one could take a cab and overtake John, and ask him either to give us the extra money, or to tell Mr. Norton to come another time ?"

"I have money, aunt," replied Mab, recovering from her astonishment. "Uncle left me plenty, and if you like to give Mr. Norton my room—pray do so. I can sleep with you."

"No, my dear," replied Miss Lavinia, looking fondly at Mab's little delicate white bower, "no, we shall have no young man in here. I shall give him my room and come and

sleep with you ; and, since you have the money," she added, brightening up, "I think it is almost as well John is not here. He would only worry about the expense."

"Poor uncle!" thought Mab, feeling a little sore at Miss Lavinia's frankness.

"My dear, will you go down and talk to that young man in the front parlour," timidly suggested Miss Lavinia, "whilst I get his room ready."

"Yes, aunt, if it will oblige you ; besides, I must do it—I am the cause of his coming here."

Mab bathed her eyes, smoothed her hair, shook her skirts, and went down at once. She found Frederick Norton walking up and down the front parlour, and looking, as he felt, rather rueful. Very sincerely indeed did he regret having left his comfortable hotel for a house where he received so odd a welcome. He was almost meditating a sudden flight, when the door opened ; he turned round and saw Mab standing on the threshold.

We have already said, that, though Mab was neither pretty nor beautiful, she was something beyond both, and that something is far more rare than beauty, and, unless when this is of the highest order, far more seducing. Mab, however, only vaguely knew that she was attractive ; she had not as yet been in society, and had not received that test of admiration which envy itself must yield, and modesty perceive. She was certainly not prepared for Frederick Norton's amazed and dazzled look. He was taken by surprise, and betrayed more than he knew, the admiration he felt. She stood before him, her cheeks still flushed with recent tears, her deep, dark grey eyes half shyly veiled by white lids and long black lashes, a smile trembling on her parted lips, her whole countenance breathing a spirit and sweetness which made him forget that her features were not classical, and her outlines by no means faultless. He only saw that the pretty yellow-haired child now stood before him a lovely and blooming girl. He advanced towards her, and taking her extended hand, he said with slight though perceptible emotion,

"I hope you have not forgotten your old friend Fred, Miss Winter,"

"Friend and defender," replied Mab, with a smile which completed Frederick Norton's undoing. He fell in love that moment—deeply, desperately, and for the first time in his life. But he did not know it—the patients who suffer from that mal-

ady rarely do ; he only thought Mab was the sweetest girl he had ever seen.

"I must give aunt time to get his room ready," thought Mab ; and, with this praiseworthy object in view, she sat down and kept Frederick Norton in conversation.

She knew how to talk, and she talked very well, like a clever girl as she was. We are not sure, indeed, that Frederick Norton minded much what Mab was saying ; she had a very sweet voice, he thought, lively and soft, and beautiful eyes, and the prettiest turn of the neck he had ever seen, and just the coloured hair he liked, golden and silky—and all these charms helped Mab's eloquence to such a degree, that, whilst the poor girl wondered if her aunt would ever come down to the rescue, Frederick thought Time never had such nimble wings—or rather he did not think at all about it ; he only sat and listened enchanted, and said little or nothing. Admiration silences some people, and it certainly made Frederick mute. If he was not a very brilliant, he was not either a very foolish young man. He had as much wisdom as many, and plenty of spirits and good humour. In business he was shrewd beyond his years or appearance ; in every-day life he was generally found sensible, modest, and well-bred. But now, sense, spirits and politeness all forsook him. He found little or nothing to say, and the little he did say he said very badly. Mab learned from him that he liked Melbourne and disliked Sydney ; that his aunt Mrs. Norton and his sister Ellen were in Ireland ; that his father was doing capitally in Australia, but that he, Frederick, meant to settle in England. Beyond such discourse Mab could not lead him. Poor Frederick ! he was in a delicious dream, in the sweetest of intoxication ; he was conscious of neither time, nor sound, nor language ; he knew nothing, save that Mab was sitting there, and that he was with her.

"I shall certainly die of exhaustion if aunt does not come down," thought Mab. Suddenly a bright thought struck her.

"You have not seen the garden. Will you come and look at it ?" she said.

"I shall be delighted to visit it," replied Frederick, full of alacrity. And delighted he looked with this little square of grass and flowers. He admired the roses, the fountain, the arbour ; above all, he admired Mab. Some women look well in gardens, girls always do ; but a garden became Mab especially. That green background, the fresh flowers, were the natural set-off of her bright hair, and her blooming face. The nymphs of

old knew well that secret of beauty. They were seen in forests, by crystal fountains, in Nature's own domain, wherever grass grew and trees gave shade, never in man's cold and garish dwellings. Armida knew it too, and Circe and all the perfidious enchantresses of the old world of song, and of the new, and Laura, Petrarch's Laura herself, did she not know it—she who showed the poet her angel face near the lonely fountain of Vaucluse? Mab had not known it before, but she learned it now, she learned it in the glances of Frederick Norton, who was drinking in love with alarming rapidity. He looked at the fountain, at the rustic seat, and the arbour, and he said with a half sigh :

"You sit and work here?"

"Sometimes."

Frederick's eyes seemed to say : Happy seat, happy arbour ! Mab looked demure, and felt very much amused.

"You must think very little of an English garden now," she said.

Very warmly did Frederick Norton assure her that an English garden, such an English garden as this, was delightful in his eyes ; and then the variety of the English climate was so delightful, too, and the singing birds ! Of course she had singing birds.

"Yes, but I have no dog," replied Mab despondently.

"You wish for one?" cried Frederick, with sparkling eyes.

"I long for one, but cannot get it."

"A King Charles, perhaps—a Blenheim."

"No, nor yet a Scotch terrier. I want a small black and tan terrier ; but the breed is extinct, I am sure, or Robert would not be so long about getting me one."

Tired with standing, and having fairly exhausted every subject of discourse, Mab sat down on the bench. At once Frederick sat down by her side. To her despair, he was evidently preparing for another delightful hour, and Mab was wondering if the laws of hospitality really forbade escape, when relief came from an unexpected quarter.

The back parlour window opened, and Robert, who had come home an hour earlier, for the express purpose of having some tender conversation with Mab, appeared standing there in a rigid attitude, and looking at the pair on the bench with a solemn and severe countenance.

Mab saw him first.

She rose, and Frederick Norton, looking up, perceived Rob-

ert's gloomy and forbidding countenance. But Frederick was in a delightful mood ; he forgot that he had always disliked Robert, and that they had nearly fallen out the day before. He left the bench, and went towards Mr. Ford's eldest son with a friendly face and a hand frankly extended, which Robert could not well refuse to press. They shook hands through the open window, but Mab saw that the cloud had not left Robert's brow, and she was shrewd enough to guess what had brought it there. She smiled and nodded at him, however, with a look of perfect innocence, and saying significantly,

"I dare say aunt wants me ; I shall leave you and Mr. Norton together."

She left the garden and entered the house.

Frederick's looks followed her until the hem of her garment had vanished ; then turning to Robert, he said, with more frankness than good-breeding allows,

"What a charming creature your sister has grown up !"

"Miss Winter is not my sister," drily replied Robert.

"Ay, true : has that mystery never been cleared up ?"

"Never."

But Frederick seemed unconscious of Robert's short replies ; he was in that dreamland where neither politeness nor impertinence can reach the happy wanderer, and it was plain that politeness only made him talk at all. Talk he did, however, leaning on the sill of the parlour window, and listening for the sound of Mab's voice in the house ; and, secretly exasperated though he felt, Robert was compelled, by all the laws of hospitality, to keep him in conversation.

No sooner was Mab free, than she ran up to her aunt's room. She found Miss Lavinia sitting on a chair in the deepest mental distress, and the room as little ready for Frederick Norton as when he arrived an hour before.

"Oh ! Mab," she said, "why did you not come ?"

"I was with Mr. Norton."

"And what did he want with you all this time ? Could you not have sent him into the Square ? I do not think Robert will like it."

Mab, though innocent, blushed, and asked what she should do.

"Do go and ask Mr. Norton if he will have the chest of drawers so, near the door or between the two windows."

But Mab refused to do this, and entreated that they might get on.

"But Mab, do tell me about the chest of drawers. Do you think Mr. Norton would object to our leaving matters as they are?"

"I am sure he would not."

"Are you really?"

"Indeed I am, aunt."

"Well then," said Miss Lavinia, rising, "that chest of drawers was a weight on my mind, and now I feel relieved, and we can see about the rest."

The rest meant everything, for, in her anxiety about the chest of drawers, Miss Ford had forgotten the dinner.

"You know," she faltered, "that John went away without——"

"I have money, aunt; what shall we get for dinner?"

"We had lamb yesterday, but I cut it up for sandwiches——"

"Aunt, we cannot give Mr. Norton sandwiches."

"I am sorry I cut it up."

It was useless to argue with her. Mab ran downstairs, ordered a couple of fowls, a tart, vegetables, and wine and fruit for the dessert. She had Mr. Norton's luggage transferred from the hall to his room, and, after giving the kitchen a last look, and seeing the cloth laid in the parlour, she ran up to her own room and dressed for dinner. Through her open window she could hear Robert and their guest talking in the garden below, in tones that sounded cordial enough. Mab laughed to herself and thought:

"Old Robert, you must get accustomed to seeing me admired—indeed you must."

Mab had too much good taste to make herself fine, but there was no harm in putting on a very becoming pale blue muslin dress. None indeed; and she looked as fresh and fair as is "the pleasant month of May," when she joined the two young men in the garden. Was not Robert there, and were not William and Edward coming? There they are indeed! That is their knock, they have learned the news from Lucy, and they rush into the garden, gleeful and joyous. They do not know their father has left; and if they knew it, what then? Frederick, the new friend, the new pleasure, is there. There is a warm shaking of hands, as if years had passed since their meeting; during that ceremony Mab and Robert stand apart, Robert reproachfully looking at Mab, who bends over a flower, apparently unconscious of the gaze. She feels it, however, and she knows it is her muslin dress is the cause; and Robert is very tiresome and despotic, and

Mab will not yield to him in this. She will look pretty—ay, and as pretty as she can.

Across these thoughts comes one tender and remorseful. Mr. Ford is away; the friend, the more than father. He is away, is this a day for rejoicing? He is sailing on a sea which may be stormy, for clouds are gathering in the mild evening sky, and the wind is rising—is this a day for merry-making, for muslin dresses that make Frederick Norton's looks ever wander towards her with increasing admiration!

Robert saw the tears in her eyes.

"What is the matter?" he whispered.

"Uncle has gone," she replied.

William turned round full of surprise.

"Yes," resumed Mab, addressing him and his brother in a tone of some reproach, "he left this afternoon, and you never bade him good-bye."

She felt she had said too much, and left the garden. As she entered the house, she met Miss Lavinia, attired in her best cap and her grey silk, and unusually fluttered. Mab, forgetting her own muslin, felt virtuously indignant.

"Oh! aunt," she exclaimed, "you too do not care about poor uncle being gone—no one cares about him. What would he think if he came back and found us all so gay?"

"My goodness! I hope he will not come," cried Miss Lavinia, distracted at the mere prospect; "he would never forgive me, the fowls and the tart—never, Mab!"

"Yes he would, aunt, for I am to blame, not you. Well, I suppose we cannot help it, with a stranger and a guest in the house," she added in a less remorseful tone; "and is dinner ready, aunt?"

"Yes, my dear, quite ready."

The tidings that dinner was ready reached the garden. The young men came in; each took his place, and Mab found herself next Frederick, and opposite Robert. Miss Ford said grace in the absence of her brother; this, and his vacant place filled by Robert, recalled to Mr. Ford's sons the fact that he was no longer with them. Robert looked thoughtful for many reasons, and there was just a touch of regret in the otherwise happy faces of his younger brothers. But it could not last. Frederick's presence, the good cheer on the table, the roast fowls, the delicate vegetables, the tart—it stood on a side-board awaiting its fate—the sparkling wines banished all melancholy thoughts. Robert, indeed, sat silent and dark, for, with growing displeasure,

he saw how Frederick's eyes were ever seeking Mab's; but William and Edward had not a thought, not a care. Miss Lavinia herself felt pleasurably excited. The roast fowls, "just as they used to be at her godmother's," had roused her into a sort of joy and liveliness. Oh! how pleasant it would be to have money, and spend it and see company, and live daintily as do the rich! And she does not think of Mr. Ford! How should she? when to think of him is to think of keeping house for eight on two pounds a week, and not daring to call one's soul one's own.

But Mr. Ford is not forgotten. There is one—not his child—on whose plate the dainty fare lies scarcely tasted. There is one whom neither Frederick's adoring though shy glances, nor Robert's jealous looks, can move this evening; one whose heart would leap with joy if he were to appear suddenly. Ay, Mr. Ford, you were right: it is not the beings whom we most love, for whom we sacrifice most, that return that love—the wronged one is often the truest.

CHAPTER VII.

THE excitement of Frederick's presence had subsided by the next morning; besides, the offices, inexorable as fate, kept their jaws open to receive their victims. The three brothers dropped off after breakfast, and, to Miss Lavinia's relief, and Robert's satisfaction, Frederick Norton went with them.

"My dear," said Miss Ford to Mab, "you have more money, I hope?"

"Plenty, aunt," gaily replied Mab, to whom the sum of forty pounds, left by Mr. Ford, seemed an inexhaustible supply.

"Well, then," rejoined Miss Ford, with a cheerful alacrity inspired by the unusual consciousness of having money to spend, "what shall we have for dinner?"

A council was held, and its result would have horrified Mr. Ford; but Mab had a generous heart and an open hand, and money being at her command, she did not know how to spare.

Frederick Norton made his appearance a little before dinner-time. Miss Ford was engaged upstairs, and Mab was reading in the garden.

"I am afraid I am disturbing you," he said, seeming rather agitated.

"Do not mention it," sweetly answered Mab as she closed her book.

"You were—reading," hesitatingly continued Frederick.

Mab was going to reply that she was, when a yelping sound which seemed to proceed from Frederick's waistcoat, made her start. The young man laughed, and Mab remained amazed to see a small black dog's head, with erect ears and round bright eyes, appear in the place whence the yelping sound had proceeded.

"Come, Fancy, show yourself to your mistress," gaily said Frederick, putting down on the gravel of the garden a perfect and diminutive terrier. A bright brass collar was around its neck, and attached to this was a blue leash, which Frederick put into Mab's hand; upon which Fancy half strangled herself, in vain efforts to fly at the young man, and not being able to effect her purpose, barked furiously.

"What a lovely little creature!" cried Mab, delighted; "how can I thank you, Mr. Norton! But where and how did you procure such a beauty?"

"A most fortunate accident," replied Frederick; "I called on a friend of my father's, and found the whole family frenzied with alarm. This passionate little wretch had barked at a rich bachelor uncle, who declared he would not put his foot in the house whilst the dog remained in it. I offered to take it away at once; and this being accepted, I brought it to you."

"Does it bite?" asked Mab.

"It will not bite you," confidently replied young Norton, who knew from the dealer who had sold her, that though Fancy might bark, her bite was as great a fiction as the story of the bachelor uncle. And, indeed, Fancy, on being taken up in her new mistress's arms, showed a fond though jealous disposition. She licked Mab's hands and growled at Frederick, who entertained himself with teasing her, and who found the task so amusing, that he never thought of relinquishing it, or of releasing Mab until Robert and his brothers came in.

This time Robert showed decided temper. He looked dark at Frederick, and scowled at Fancy, who showed him her teeth; and to Mab he said with much asperity,

"What do you want with that ill-tempered little brute?"

"To pet it," answered Mab, nursing Fancy, who, curling round, began snoring in her lap.

Robert looked as he felt, deeply displeased, and walked away coldly and haughtily; whilst Mab, resolved to brave him, bestowed her sweetest smiles on the giver of Fancy. But if Mab thought to carry on this pleasant pastime of teasing Robert and

charming his rival for any length of time, she was destined to grievous disappointment.

Scarcely was dinner over when two ladies were announced.

"What name, Lucy?" asked Miss Ford, rising in a flutter; visitors were very rare at Queen Square.

"Mrs. and Miss Norton," answered a strong distinct voice in the hall, and Mrs. Norton appeared in the doorway, followed by Ellen, now a very pretty girl, with a very sweet dark face.

"So you dine late," said Mrs. Norton, nodding at Miss Ford; "well, you are altered—and where is grey-eyes?"

And as she spoke she fastened a piercing look on Mab, who rose blushing and smiling.

That look strengthened Mrs. Norton's resolve. On coming home from Ireland that morning, Mrs. Norton had learned that her nephew was domiciled at Mr. Ford's. Now, she also knew that there was a young girl in Mr. Ford's family, and she held this arrangement to be a highly dangerous one. She felt convinced, on what grounds we know not, that Frederick was of an inflammable nature, and she strongly suspected that Mab had grown up with a tolerable share of good looks. A glance at the young girl now convinced her of her nephew's peril, and she came to the rescue, with that straightforwardness which was part of her tactics.

"I have come to rid you of your guest," she said, nodding at Frederick, and addressing Miss Ford; "a pretty thing he did to come here, when his aunt and sister expected him to take them about London."

"Dear me!" murmured Miss Ford, "I am very sorry we have robbed you, Mrs. Norton."

"No time lost," said that lady cheerfully; "he can see us home—his room is ready."

Now this was a most awkward speech for Mrs. Norton's nephew. Vexed though he was to go, Frederick Norton could no more express a wish to remain, than Mab could press him to do so. Robert would not put in a word to detain him, and Miss Lavinia was only too glad to have him out of the house. William and Edward remonstrated indeed, but were at once silenced by Mrs. Norton.

"Fiddlededee, young men!" she said, "you can't want my nephew as much as I do—besides, you are very welcome to come and see him. So let's hear no more about it."

Of course no more could be said. Thus ended Mr. Norton's brief visit, to Robert's satisfaction and Mab's annoyance. Her

displeasure was not lessened by the open admiration with which Robert Ford regarded his pretty cousin, Ellen. The young lady received this flattery of looks with a graceful shyness which reminded Mab rather bitterly of old times, but which Robert called "sweet modesty." Mab scorned to seem envious, and she therefore joined in his admiration: and, when the visitors were gone, confessed that "Miss Norton was a very lovely girl, indeed!" but she treasured up her secret resentment, and found means to give it vent the very next morning.

"Mab," said Robert to her, after breakfast, "I am not going into the city until the afternoon, for I am to attend to some business in the west end for Mr. George—and this leaves me a full hour to spare. Had we not better read a little French together?"

"Thank—you," negligently replied Mab; "I think I shall go out this morning."

"Where are you going, my dear?" asked Miss Lavinia.

"I don't know—I want to take out Fancy: these little creatures want a good deal of exercise."

Miss Ford groaned inwardly at the irreverent reply, and Robert bit his lip; but Mab's will, though not often asserted, was not to be disputed. She put on her bonnet, and went out with Fancy. It may be that Mab had hoped and expected to be accompanied. Certain it is that her solitary walk, though rather a long one, did not put her in a better humour, nor did it lessen her displeasure to hear Miss Ford say to her, when she returned:

"My dear, what a pity you were out! Mrs. and Miss Norton came in a carriage for you. They wanted to take you out driving—I forget where, but to some delightful place. Miss Norton looked lovely this morning. More so than last night, Robert said."

Mab untied her bonnet-strings, and tossed the bonnet itself on the sofa.

"I am so hot!" she said, in answer to Miss Lavinia's surprised look.

"You do not look hot; and this has been quite a morning of calls—I have had a visit from the Irish Fords."

The Irish Fords were a branch of the Lancashire Fords, who had settled and married in Ireland three generations back, but who had kept up the connexion with their English relatives. The last representatives of this emigrant branch were two twin sisters, who had paid many a summer visit to Mr. Ford's mother, when Mr. Ford had flirted with them, said his sister; that is to

say, when the whole four were young. Mab had often heard of the beauty of the twin sisters, of their lovely complexions, bright hair, and blue eyes, and of their fondness for each other.

"And have the Miss Fords been here?" she asked.

"Oh! no; they never stir now; but their half brother has been, Mr. O'Lally. He came to London on business. I wonder what he does; and he brought me some Balbriggan stockings—so kind of the twins!"

"But, aunt, that Mr. O'Lally is nothing to you."

"Well, no, for he is all Irish, I suppose. His mother was a—I never can remember those O's and Macs—and I wonder what his father was?" added Miss Lavinia with a deeply perplexed look.

"An O'Lally," suggested Mab.

"Oh, to be sure! and it seems they think a great deal of him. He is a very handsome young man, and he seems dotingly fond of his sisters; I dare say they have been quite mothers to him."

"And when is he calling again?"

"I am sure I don't know. He is going off to Ireland to night; I wonder people will travel at night."

A bright idea struck Mab. She wanted to quarrel with Robert, and she could not quarrel with him about Ellen. That Mr. O'Lally, whom she had not seen, and would most probably never see, would do very well. She opened the door of the back parlour, where Robert sat writing, and closing it again so that Miss Ford might not hear her, she said, pettishly:

"Oh! Robert, how tiresome you are! Why did you not keep that Mr. O'Lally for me to see him?"

Robert raised his eyes, and looked at her.

"To see him. What for?"

"What for! aunt has set me wild about him. So handsome, so amiable, so charming! Now, you know, I never see a new face, and since poor Mr. Norton is gone, you might have been humane enough to save up this delightful Irishman for me."

"I am sorry I did not think of it," gravely replied Robert; "Mr. O'Lally is indeed a remarkable young man; but perhaps he would not have let himself be saved up for you, Mab."

"Remarkable! Oh! Robert, you are very tiresome. Did a remarkable man come within my reach, as it were, and did he escape me? It was cruel of you, Robert."

"I can describe him for you," kindly said Robert; "and as I had to keep him in conversation for half-an-hour, whilst aunt

was putting on her best cap, you will grant I had an opportunity for observation."

"Well then, describe," said Mab, much piqued.

"Mr. O'Lally is about my age, decidedly handsome, and very like a remarkable individual whom I will not mention, to leave you the pleasure of guessing."

"Thank you."

"Like most Irishmen, he talks very well."

"I like a good talker."

"I think he is amiable."

"I hope he is not good-natured."

"Good-natured is the last epithet you would apply to him."

"I am so glad! I hate a good-natured man."

"Thank you," said Robert, in his turn; he was beginning to lose his temper.

"You need not, I speak as I think; and so Mr. O'Lally is amiable."

"I have a strong impression that Mr. O'Lally is amiable because it is part of his design to fascinate, and he wishes to fascinate because he wishes to rule."

"A charming but incomplete description. Pray, go on."

"I shall go on with my writing, if you please," coldly answered Robert. "I have said enough to enlighten you, and I am very busy."

"Then you will tell me no more."

"There is no more to tell."

"And in half an hour Mr. O'Lally said nothing to you."

"He said plenty, but I have not the art of repeating conversation."

"I am much obliged to you, Robert. I do not ask you to talk on your own account, only to repeat a conversation which has just taken place, and you are too busy."

"You are very unreasonable, Mab."

"Of course I am. It is not you who are unkind. But the truth is, Robert, you were not pleased that Mr. Norton should be here, and you are displeased that I think so much of this stranger."

Robert laughed scornfully. He would not be jealous of a man Mab had never seen; but he said rather sharply:

"Mab, you are very ——"

"Disagreeable," she interrupted; "thank you, Robert," and she flew out of the room, looking very indignant, but not sorry in her heart at having made a real quarrel out of Mr. O'Lally.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE event proved the wisdom of Mab's plan. Alarmed at her displeasure, Robert lost no time in seeking a reconciliation; peace and oblivion were decreed, and a pic-nic, to take place in Richmond Park, was decided upon, as the basis of the treaty. The Nortons were included in this plan: Robert tacitly agreed to tolerate Frederick, and as tacitly Mab consented to suffer his sister's presence.

"My dear, it will cost a great deal of money," timidly objected Miss Ford.

"No, it will not, aunt. Besides, we must have a little pleasure," decisively answered Mab.

Susan's censures in the kitchen were very significant, but only addressed to Lucy's confidential ears.

"The little upstart is going on finely whilst master is away," she said; "if my poor mistress were alive, and saw all these doings!"

But Lucy liked Mab, and took her part.

"Miss Mab has a spirit of her own," she said; "and I like her for it."

At length the day came; the morning was lovely. Mab's heart beat with pleasure, when, running to her window, she saw the blue sky and the shining sun.

"Oh! aunt!" she cried to Miss Lavinia, "it is so fine, shall I go down and pack the hampers?"

"My dear, it is only six o'clock."

"But, aunt, we cannot go too early, can we?"

And without heeding Miss Ford's objections, she went down and set to work in good earnest. Thanks to her energetic efforts, there really was very little delay; breakfast was got over in good time; by nine two open carriages were at the door, and by half-past nine they were rolling away. The contents of the carriages were distributed as follows: Miss Lavinia, Mrs. Norton, Ellen, and Robert, were in one; Mab, Frederick, and Edward, and William were in the other.

Robert had firmly, inexorably resolved to be with Mab, but Ellen had as firmly resolved that he should be with her; her brother was no *cavalier servente*, and William and Edward were worse than nothing. Feminine will opposed to masculine will was sure to carry the day; but Ellen, who was seated next him, looked so pretty and so demure in her white chip bonnet and

pink muslin, that consolation came to Robert whether he liked it or not.

There are few spots more beautiful than Richmond Park, and few views are so sweet in their way as the view from Richmond Hill. It was there they alighted. Mab stood and looked with Fancy in her arms, and forgot Frederick and Robert, and the whole world, indeed, in that sweet vision of verdure and water, so silvan and so romantic, which she had not seen since childhood.

"Is it not lovely?" whispered Frederick, glad of the opportunity of hanging over her.

"It is exquisite!" replied Mab; "do look, Robert."

"I am looking," shortly answered Robert, who was looking not exactly at Father Thames, and at his enchanting banks, but at Frederick's enamoured attitude, and who found the prospect odious. Mab saw the look, and it amused her. At once proving herself expert in the innate art of flirting, she made good her hold on the two young men. Ellen had to be satisfied with the doubtful chivalry of William and Edward, Miss Lavinia kept Mrs. Norton company, and Mab stayed behind with her two admirers.

With jealous anger, Robert saw that this fond young girl, until now the slave of his will, had looks and smiles for Frederick. Yet she held between him and his rival a sort of even balance which angered him even more than all. She gaily threw her flowing cloak to young Norton, then ran on alone in the grass with Fancy at her heels; and when they overtook her, it was Robert's arm she accepted, and by Robert's side that she walked; but as she did so, she kindly gave Frederick a sort of shy look that meant, "I could not be so free with you, you know," and that reconciled him to his fate. He lingered behind them, and Mab, glancing round now and then, rewarded him for his patience by kind glances and pleasant words, though few, and every time she turned thus, the heavens opened and the sun shone on Frederick Norton. Robert, highly displeased, once made a feint of relinquishing her arm, but Mab cured him of the fancy by saying in a low, arch tone,

"Are you tired? Shall I take Frederick's arm?"

Robert did not answer, but walked on in gloomy silence, meditating revenge. At length they came to a green and secluded spot, where the two elder ladies stopped.

"I think we may camp here," said Mrs. Norton, sitting down. Everyone followed her example. The hampers were

brought and unpacked, and their contents, spread on a snow-white damask cloth, were done full justice to. The cold fowls, the salad, the ham, the tart, the bottled beer, were delicious in their way, and the open air sharpened healthy appetites which love itself could not have conquered.

When the meal was over, William took out his fiddle and struck up a tune. Politeness compelled Robert to choose Ellen for his partner, and to leave Mab to Frederick. The dancing was kept up until the orchestra declared himself tired, and suggested an exploring expedition.

"Yes, yes, go all of you," said Mrs. Norton; "I shall stay and keep Miss Ford company."

Meek Miss Ford assented, and off they went laughing, running, and finally separating. Ellen was resolved to have her share of Robert this time, and having contrived to stumble in the very beginning, she accepted his assistance, and kept him chained to her side by the tyrant courtesy.

Mab, in the meanwhile, felt wild with excitement and pleasure. She ran on, not caring who followed; there was grass beneath her feet, there were leaves, thick and green, above her head; it was a beautiful day—a lovely day—and Mab felt very happy. Frederick did not lose sight of her. Fleet though she was, he soon overtook her; he was not given to classical allusions, but, as he followed her waving garments, he could not help thinking of heathen nymphs, and how pleasant the fauns, who ran after these light-footed goddesses, must have found the task, if, and he much doubted it, their mythological ladyships were half as pretty as was Mab. She heard his quick step behind her, and, looking round, stopped short.

"Let us wait for the rest," she said, and, throwing her hat on the grass, she sat down at the foot of a gigantic oak. Frederick leaned against the trunk, and looked down at her. In a voice tremulous with emotion, he ventured on the first compliment he had paid her yet.

"How lovely you look in all this green!"

His eyes said far more than his words. They spoke admiration bordering on tenderness, and Mab understood their language. Her lids drooped, she felt a woman's power, and the revelation was grateful.

Still she thought it better to rise, and to look for the rest, as she said; they were soon found. William and Edward, shouting and excited, Ellen pretty and rosy, and Robert, black and sullen, in the rear. Now Mab did not want to be with

Robert, but, very perversely, she did not want him to be with Ellen. She knew the means to draw him away, and she used them unsparingly. Poor Frederick! His heart was finally lost that day. Unconscious and reckless of Robert's jealous eyes, he followed Mab like her shadow. He gathered flowers for her, and rushed amongst the briars, and tore his hands recklessly to get those she preferred. He got his legs wet, too, to procure her a water-plant she fancied; he did, in short, what most men in love do, and to all eyes save Mab's and Robert's he looked extremely foolish. Indeed, his aunt and his sister indignantly told him, the next day, he had behaved like an idiot; agreeing for once—a rare occurrence—and even Miss Lavinia, the most lenient of women, privately informed Mab that Mr. Norton was quite absurd. But, as we have said, Mab did not think so, still less did Robert. Mr. Ford's eldest son now discovered to his cost that he was of a jealous temper. Mab's flirting had indeed very unfortunate consequences. Robert forgot his prudent resolve to be silent with Mab until he had finally settled with Mr. George. He only remembered that, if he could trust his eyes, the prize he had been planning to have so long was just ready to slip out of his fingers. He determined that it should not, come what would. And, as he was young still, he acted at once on that determination.

"Aunt," he whispered to Miss Lavinia, "do keep Mr. Norton a little bit, will you?"

"Certainly, my dear Robert."

And whilst Miss Lavinia claimed Frederick's attention and perplexed him with botanical questions, Robert, hastily taking Mab's arm, led her away.

"Robert," she cried, "what is the matter?"

But he walked on until a sufficient distance spread between them and the party, then, stopping short and dropping Mab's arm, he looked at her.

Mab required no words from him to tell her what was coming. With the quickness of thought she guessed it. Her heart beat, and she felt faint; but, rallying, she said,

"What is it, Robert?"

"Mab, I do not think I need tell you how dear you are to me. I believe your affection for me is great, but how great I cannot know unless your words confirm it. Mab, we have known each other many years—why should we not spend our two lives together?"

He took her hand and looked in her face, not with the ar-

dour Frederick would have shown under similar circumstances, but with enough of genuine tenderness to move her. Still she did not reply.

"Mab, will you be my wife?" he continued.

"Perhaps so," she answered, looking up at him, and her lips breaking into a rosy smile.

"Perhaps so!"

"Well, then, some day, if you like, but not just yet."

The answer was not wholly displeasing to Robert; for of course he did not want to marry Mab just yet, but it was not wholly satisfactory either, for Mab did not seem as seriously impressed as he wished her to be.

"Mab," he said, a little imperiously, "there must be no misunderstanding. You have tried me strangely to-day, but I will be so tried no more."

"Indeed!"

"No. You like Norton—all right and good; but you must love me only, Mab. You are mine—all mine. Remember that."

Mab felt a little frightened at his tone. She loved Robert dearly, she had always thought and expected to be his wife some day, she certainly preferred him to Frederick, and she was woman enough to like his vehement assertion of a right over her, and, half proudly, half shyly, she said:

"Don't be foolish, old Robert—you know there is no one like you."

But old Robert was not easily moved from his purpose.

"Mab," he said, "it must be a clear understanding; once for all, are you my wife, or are you not?"

"I am not," answered Mab, "but——" she added, smiling.

"But you will be," he continued for her. "Mab, you are honourable; give me your hand and your word, and I will trust you with a dozen Fredericks."

Mab was touched. She gave him her hand, and, looking him honestly in the face, she said:

"Robert, if uncle consents—I do."

The last cloud cleared from Robert's countenance; he smiled and looked quite handsome.

"Let us sit down a while and talk," he said.

"Talk of what?" asked Mab, sinking down lazily on a green knoll.

"Of love, if you like," replied Robert.

He took her hand again, and looked fondly in her face. He

had never liked her better than he did now. Jealousy had done him good, and rivalry had heightened Mab's charms. Besides, she now looked very pretty. There was the light in her eyes and the glow on her cheeks, which provoke and attract. She was in a coquettish mood, too, and, laughing in his face, said saucily :

"Talk."

"Yes, Mab, I will talk. We shall soon be married, I hope."

"Soon!" cried Mab, frightened.

"Well, in a few years," replied the phlegmatic Robert; "and then," he added, with more ardour, "then, Mab, we shall indeed be happy. In the first place, we must have a villa somewhere, say on the Thames."

Mab opened her eyes.

"We are both fond of the country, and we shall like that. You will have plenty to see to at home, a garden with roses and swans, Mab, and I shall turn my mind to agricultural pursuits."

"But, old Robert, the money!"

"Never mind about the money," was his calm reply, "we shall have it. I do not care for a large house—and, indeed, I was wrong to say a villa, I should prefer a farm, a handsome one, of course. It would be pleasant to have the boys down on a Sunday, or during their holidays. It would do them all the good in the world, poor fellows. Besides, we could assist them other ways. We should have Aunt Lavinia, too."

"And uncle?" suggested Mab.

"Of course. Well, what do you say to my plans?"

"How will you carry them out, Robert?"

"Never mind how. What will you say to me if I do carry them out?"

"Say! Robert, I shall adore you."

"I wish you would begin now," he replied, a little impatiently; "you are not as fond of me as you might be, Mab."

Mab replied, "Nonsense;" but not much liking the turn Robert's thoughts and conversation were both taking, she rose and said they must join the party.

Evening was closing in, and all agreed it was time to go. True to his promise of trusting her with a dozen Fredericks, Robert made no effort to be in the same carriage with Mab. The drive home was lovely; Frederick Norton thought it enchanting. The sky was covered with light mists, through which shone the fair moon: William and Edward talked and laughed incessantly. Mab spoke not one word—she was thinking of

what had just passed, and she felt frightened at her own rashness. It was not that Robert was not acceptable to her; from her childhood she had thought, vaguely at first, definitely enough in latter years, that she was to be his wife. She was troubled with no doubts, no fears concerning their mutual affection; of course he loved her, and of course she loved him. No; what frightened her was the marriage, the tie, the new existence that lay before her. Robert, who was practical, had at once placed their wedded life before her view; and even the villa on the Thames could not reconcile Mab to the vision. She remained very quiet, thinking and wondering, and Frederick Norton, sitting by her side, was, in the meanwhile, in the seventh heavens, unconscious that his paradise had already been given away for ever.

As soon as they reached home, Mab ran up to her room, and there, when she joined her later, Miss Lavinia found her sitting with her elbow on the table, and her cheek on her hand.

"My dear, what is it?" she asked, kindly.

Mab looked very grave, and replied:

"I am engaged to Robert."

"I am so glad!" cried Miss Lavinia, beaming; "I always knew it would be, but I am so glad. You are worthy of him, and I can say no more."

She could not, indeed, in her creed.

"Robert is very good," said Mab.

"My dear, he is noble, he is great!"

Mab was silent.

"You will be the happiest of women," continued Miss Lavinia.

"Robert cannot marry just yet, can he?" asked Mab.

"Well, I am afraid he cannot, my dear; remember, a hundred and fifty pounds a year is but a small income."

"Of course," nodded Mab; "I daresay he cannot marry for five years, aunt."

"Well, you are both so young."

"Then it is all right," interrupted Mab; "I got quite frightened coming home at the thought of a wedding."

Her countenance expressed such evident satisfaction, that Miss Lavinia grew uneasy.

"My dear," she exclaimed, anxiously, "do you love Robert enough?"

"Do I love him enough?" cried Mab; "oh, aunt, how can you put the question? Why, I cannot even imagine loving anyone else."

"Then, my dear child," faltered Miss Lavinia, in her emotion, "it is as it should be, and you will be the happiest of women."

"I don't object, aunt," saucily replied Mab; "but not just yet."

But though she looked gay, Mab was troubled at heart, and she thought—"Ah! if uncle were not so far away!"

CHAPTER IX.

MR. FORD was far away, but he was not so far as Mab thought.

The last male representative of the Irish Fords, as they had always been called in the family, had died mad; leaving two twin daughters and a widow, whose second husband was a genuine Celt, named O'Lally. By him Mrs. O'Lally had a son, whose birth she survived but a few weeks; the boy's father died young, and his two sisters, by their mother's first marriage, reared him to man's estate. They were rich and handsome, but they never married; apart from an affection so strong that it made the thought of separation unbearable, Emily and Ellen Ford loved their young brother too fondly to think of depriving him of their inheritance, the only one he had to expect. Was he not an O'Lally, and their brother—the object of all their pride as well as of their deepest love?

Although the days when these ladies visited the Lancashire Fords, and Emily flirted with Mr. Ford, and Ellen was Lavinia's bosom friend, had long been gone, they were remembered on both sides; and every now and then Miss Ellen and Mr Ford's sister exchanged letters, and such tokens of affection as the Balbriggan stockings. After residing many years in Dublin for the education of their brother, the Miss Fords returned to their native place in the south west of Ireland, and there purchased an estate from an old friend of their family, a Mr. Gardiner, which estate they at once christened O'Lally's Town, in anticipation, no doubt, of the flourishing aspect it was to take with time. Now it was a desert, and not a house appeared within view of that in which the Miss Fords and Mr. O'Lally resided. They had not been in their new home much more than a month, when Mr. Ford resolved upon taking that journey to America, of which, after recording the commencement, we may now give the close.

The dwelling at O'Lally's Town was a dilapidated old house,

large enough to be called a mansion, if its extreme plainness had not forbidden the title. It was a low, long, barn-like building, dark and gloomy in aspect, with few windows, and wide, blank spaces of wall between. It stood on a rocky shore close by the Atlantic, surrounded by grand and majestic scenery, with which it had nothing in common; for its utter solitude alone redeemed it from the reproach of commonplace ugliness. Its desolate aspect added to its other drawbacks. O'Lally's Town, as it was now generally called, was anything but a pleasant abode. The rooms were vast and cheerless; what comfort indeed could abide in those immense chambers, which looked as if furniture would never fill them? The Miss Fords, too prudent to make the attempt, left the place pretty much as they found it; they kept the large beds, the massive chairs and tables, which they had purchased with the house and estate from the late owner, and they added little or nothing to these indispensable articles of furniture.

"It will do when our brother marries," observed Miss Emily; and Miss Ellen, who always acquiesced in her sister's decisions, said so too. As "our brother" was now twenty-three, the contingency, which was to refurnish O'Lally's Town, did not seem a very remote one.

"I wish he would marry Annie Gardiner," said Miss Emily one evening.

Miss Ellen took off her spectacles and looked at her sister.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, "I never thought of that."

The two sisters were sitting together in a wide, low room on the ground floor, which was the parlour, sitting-room, and drawing-room, too, of the house. It was meagrely furnished, and felt chill, though there burned a bright turf fire on the hearth; for Miss Emily scorned both coals and grate, and would have none but the national fuel. The light of the candle lamp shed a small bright circle on the table near which the two ladies sat working, but left the rest of the large, dreary room in comparative obscurity.

"Of course," said Miss Ellen, "it would be just the thing if he would marry Annie; but do you think he will, Emily?"

Miss Emily gave a little start, and did not answer. The night was stormy and wild, and a great blast of wind now rose moaning around the old house with a dismal lament. And above the wind sounded the fierce roar of the huge sea-waves dashing on the beach.

"It is a dreadful night," said Miss Ellen in a low voice, and,

looking round her with a startled face, she added, "Emily, I fear I shall never get used to this house."

"Yes, you will, my dear Ellen, I know you will."

"I suppose so—it is getting calm again, thank God! But, Emily, do you think he will marry Annie?"

Her sister did not answer at once. Miss Ellen none the less anxiously expected her reply. She had been used, from infancy to her present age of forty-five, to rely on Emily's superior will and judgment, and it was one of her habits to question her about future events with as much confidence as if they must inevitably lie within Miss Emily's knowledge. In this consisted the only difference between the twin sisters; both had been very pretty girls, and were still pleasing fair-haired women, of delicate and refined aspect, of gentle manners, genial tempers, and kind hearts; both adored the younger brother whom they had reared, and to whom they had sacrificed youth, beauty, and fortune, without a sigh of regret; but, similar as they were, it was Miss Emily who ruled, and Miss Ellen who obeyed: the shadow of a contest for power had never arisen between them, and never would to the end of time.

"I am sure I don't know," at length reluctantly answered Miss Emily; "but I wish he would—we asked her here for that after her father's death; we thought that seeing her daily he would take a fancy to her, but I am afraid he has not."

"She is very handsome," said Miss Ellen.

"She is, and we thought that might do something."

"We" was a favourite word with Miss Emily. She knew that she did not give her sister Ellen a fair share in the family councils, and she used the plural pronoun as a delicate compensation. It answered as the Co. of their little firm, and quite satisfied good and humble Miss Ellen.

"I am afraid, I am, that he is fond of Mary O'Flaherty," resumed Miss Emily.

"Don't say so, Emily," cried Ellen with something like energy. "She is a dear, good girl, but she has not got a farthing."

"Just so," said Emily, knitting her smooth white forehead into a thoughtful wrinkle; "but depend upon it, Ellen, it is to see her he takes those long journeys every now and then. Depend upon it, he is with her now."

Miss Ellen looked frightened and bewildered.

"Then I suppose he will marry her," she said at length.

A long silence followed this remark. Miss Emily continued hemming a handkerchief, but, with as much bitterness as her

nature allowed, she thought of the interview now doubtless taking place between her brother and the handsome Mary O'Flaherty. Miss Ellen, on the other hand, the first shock over, looked at the matter with her habitual indulgence and good-humour. Mary was very handsome and kind-hearted and cheerful, and if "our brother" loved her, what more was needed?—he had a right to please himself, of course he had, the dear boy, only what a dreary night it was for him, with the wind moaning and the sullen Atlantic roaring along the rocky coast. She did hope he was with Mary, in that bright, warm, room at her brother's, where Mary herself looked so gay and handsome, with the children around her. And a very pretty picture of comfort and love combined Miss Ellen was fashioning for herself, when the door of the room abruptly opened, and a handsome dark-haired girl, in deep mourning, entered, with pale cheeks and startled looks.

"Annie, what is it?" cried Miss Emily rising.

"I am afraid there has been a wreck," said Miss Gardiner, agitatedly. "Honour and I have heard cries for help along the coast. It is a very wild night."

Both sisters turned extremely pale and looked ready to faint. They had a nervous dread of the sea, and possessed neither physical nor moral courage to assist them in any emergency.

"What shall we do?" continued Miss Gardiner. "Shall I send out Michael with lights?"

"No, no, for heaven's sake!" cried Miss Emily, "the lights might be taken for beacons and lead to a wreck—what shall we do?"

For once she looked at her sister for counsel and assistance; but Miss Ellen was too much frightened herself to give any. The most confused images floated across her brain; she saw ships with torn sails and broken masts, and her beloved brother stood on every deck. So strong was the illusion, that it brought on a violent fit of trembling, which, to Miss Emily's alarm, threatened to become hysterical. The wreck was forgotten in this domestic incident. The two ladies did their best to restore her to calmness, and the two maidservants came to their assistance. In the distress of the moment a loud knocking at the gate was not heeded, and it had to be repeated twice before Miss Emily said, with a start:

"Michael, go and see what that is. Some one is knocking."

Michael went, but the knocking was renewed ere he reached the door, and Miss Ellen, who was gradually rallying, heard it, and faintly asked, "Who was coming?"

"Doctor Flinn, I dare say," replied Miss Emily, trying to look cheerful. "Yes, I hear his voice. It is Doctor Flinn. There, cheer up, my darling!"

"And what is Doctor Flinn coming for?" asked Miss Ellen, sitting up.

"He will tell us that, darling."

The door of the room opened as she spoke, and a short, stout man, with a round good-natured face, entered the room.

"Welcome, Doctor Flinn!" said Miss Emily, not seeing, in her eagerness, that he was followed by another person, "here is poor Ellen has been bad again."

"I am well now," said Miss Ellen, "quite well. How are you, Doctor Flinn, have you——"

She stopped short, for behind Doctor Flinn she saw, in the gloom of the open door, a taller man, whose pale face, surrounded by heavy masses of white hair, bent spectral-like towards her.

"Doctor Flinn, who—who is it?" she gasped.

Doctor Flinn laughed heartily.

"Why, your cousin, Mr. John Ford," he said, moving on one side—"your cousin, Miss Nelly, whom I found lost and wandering on this inhospitable shore an hour ago, and whom I brought here safe and sound, though rather wet, I am sorry to say."

The two Miss Fords looked at their cousin in great surprise. They had not seen him for twenty-five years, and almost doubted his identity. No visit could be less expected than was this in their new home. Miss Emily was the first to recover.

"Cousin John," she said, extending her hand, and speaking warmly and cordially, "you are welcome. How are you?"

"Well, thank you, Emily. We have got older since we met."

"We have," a little shortly said Miss Emily, who did not like to be reminded of the progress of time.

"And the wreck," here remarked Miss Ellen, looking round, "where is it—where are the others?"

"A wreck!" cried Doctor Flinn—"is there a wreck then?"

Miss Ellen seemed bewildered.

"I thought there was a wreck," she said, "and seeing cousin John so wet——"

"I am wet with rain," interrupted Mr. Ford. "You did not think I came across the Atlantic, did you, Cousin Ellen?"

Cousin Ellen did not answer, but looked helpless.

"There is no wreck," said Doctor Flinn. "What put that into your head?"

"We heard shouts," here observed Miss Gardiner, "and we thought they came from a ship in distress—at least I thought so."

"And you must needs come and frighten these two poor creatures, with their horror of the sea," said Doctor Flinn, so sharply that Miss Gardiner coloured. "Mr. Ford had lost his way, and shouted to find it again, and might have wandered till morning, I perceive, if I had not come up. Why don't you sit by the fire, Mr. Ford, and dry your clothes?—this is not a melting summer night by any means, though it is rather chill than cold."

"An awful climate!" said Mr. Ford, taking a chair and drawing it close to the fire. "I cannot say I admire your country, Cousin Emily."

"I think it a great pity your countrymen ever did admire it," answered Miss Emily, rather warmly.

"Come, come, no offence meant," said Mr. Ford, holding out a friendly hand, "you know me of old, Emily. I am outspoken, but I mean no harm."

"I am sure you do not, John," said Miss Emily, whose gentle wrath ever melted away, even more rapidly than it awoke; "and you are wet, there is no denying it, no more than the rain; but I am going to cheer you and Doctor Flinn with something Irish which your countrymen appreciate, John."

"Whisky—thank you, Emily! I never touch spirits now."

Miss Emily looked much astonished. A partiality for the bottle, especially for that bottle which contains the more ardent beverage, had always been John's weakness.

He half-smiled and said—

"I shall do very well, thank you. How is your brother?"

"Ah! you may well ask, Mr. Ford. Our brother was in London the other day, and he called on Lavinia, and learned you were travelling."

"How was Mab?" he interrupted.

"She was out; but they were all well. Not with water, John?"

"Not with water, thank you."

"Without water, if you please, Miss Emily," here slyly put in Doctor Flinn.

Miss Emily laughed, and gave the requisite orders. In a few minutes Dr. Flinn was tasting what he pronounced "the best restorative in Ireland," whilst Mr. Ford sat by the fire drying his clothes, his hands resting on his knees, his look vaguely

fixed on Annie Gardiner, who sat facing him, and who, unable to understand the meaning of so sudden a visit in the wildest part of Ireland, wondered what had brought him.

Some such thought also crossed the minds of Miss Emily and her sister, well pleased though they were to see their cousin; but though he spoke readily and answered all their questions, of his purpose in coming Mr. Ford gave no sort of explanation.

CHAPTER X.

AROUND the dwelling at O'Lally's Town extended a wild but enclosed waste, which the Miss Fords called the garden. Purple hills that met a cloudy sky bounded the prospect beyond the walls. A few shrubs, which the richness of the soil, not the care of man, had rendered luxuriant, were scattered on grassy slopes. Flowers grew here and there, but without either order or beauty, and trees there were none.

As Mr. Ford now took a solitary morning walk in this demesne, he cast a critical eye on all he saw, and came to the conclusion that the late Mr. Gardiner must have had but a poor taste in gardening matters. So total a misuse of nature and her gifts he had never witnessed.

A quick step behind him made him look round. Coming towards him he saw a pale young man, with dark hair, and bright blue eyes, in whom he at once divined the half-brother of his cousins—Mr. O'Lally.

They exchanged a rapid and searching look before they spoke. Their greeting, though friendly in appearance, was, as each felt, cold in reality. But with as much ease as if his life had been spent in the world, Mr. O'Lally at once led his sister's guest into conversation.

"You are admiring the garden," he said, with grave irony—"it is remarkable. But there will be a change a twelvemonth hence. I shall plant trees here, knock down a part of that wall, and have an iron grating, to let in the view, which is splendid. A few alleys shaded by young trees, and beds of flowers scattered on that bright green, will make a radical change."

He spoke with a coolness and decision that struck Mr. Ford. They were free from the presumptuous confidence of youth, and had all the quiet power that belongs to maturity. Mr. Ford thrust his hands in his pockets and eyed him curiously; but all he said was:

"This place seems to have been dreadfully neglected."

"Do you mean the garden?"

"The house is not in prime condition," replied Mr. Ford, with his usual bluntness.

"It is not; but I shall see to that too. However, I shall not do much in the beginning. I have other work in hands—I am building a factory."

"A factory!—it will not answer."

Mr. O'Lally smiled.

"I shall make it answer," he said quietly. "I can get cheap labour."

"Will it be good?" asked Mr. Ford, who secretly scorned the idea of a factory out of Lancashire.

"I shall make it good," still quietly replied Mr. O'Lally. "I mean to make great changes in this part of the country. I shall introduce the commercial element."

He spoke with a calmness that bewildered Mr. Ford.

Mr. O'Lally was twenty-three, and did not look twenty; but he was young, not boyish. His massive forehead, his deep-set eyes, his handsome and clearly-cut features, all spoke of an intellect and a character prematurely developed and ripe for any project.

Mr. Ford's penetration into character was not great; he had more shrewdness than real sagacity, and there was nothing very salient in Mr. O'Lally to give shrewdness fair play. His manners were gentle and pleasing, his tone was mild, his smile was remarkably sweet and winning. It required a keener eye than Mr. Ford's to detect dangerous symptoms of strength, will, and despotism, under so fair and pleasing an exterior. But Mr. Ford was guarded by an instinct which seems granted to beings of weak judgment as a compensation. He knew that he had come to O'Lally's Town on an errand which required to be concealed, and he felt that the enemy from whom he must especially conceal it was that agreeable smiling young man. From the moment that he met the look of Mr. O'Lally's pleasant but penetrating blue eyes, he had the consciousness that neither directly nor indirectly must he attempt to gain information from him. Mr. O'Lally might answer him—he probably would; but the cost of such replies would assuredly be more than Mr. Ford was willing to pay.

"I must take that old doctor in hand," thought Mr. Ford, on whom Doctor Flinn's easy and good-natured ways had produced a favourable impression. He came to this conclusion as they

turned back to the house where breakfast was waiting, as Mr. O'Lally had told him ; and as he walked with his arms folded and his eyes downcast, he was not conscious of Mr. O'Lally's look bent full upon him ; a look full of mistrust, and which answered to the impression on Mr. O'Lally's mind :

"That man has a secret he dare not tell, and comes here with an object he is afraid to reveal."

"Yes, Doctor Flinn will do," again thought Mr. Ford, as they entered the house together, and to his great satisfaction he heard Doctor Flinn's loud voice talking in the dining-room to Miss Emily. He had called in to inquire after Miss Ellen, for he was the nearest neighbor of the two ladies, and almost a daily visitor at O'Lally's Town. He had also, it appeared, something to say to Mr. O'Lally, for he waited until breakfast was over to have a conversation with him.

"Just a word about Mr. Briggs," he explanatorily added.

Miss Emily looked anxious, Mr. O'Lally smiled, and the two gentlemen walked out together in the garden.

"Cousin John," said Miss Emily, "come into the next room, if you please—I want to speak to you."

Mr. Ford obeyed. His cousin followed him into the room in which he had been received on the preceding evening, and Miss Ellen and Miss Gardiner remained behind. Miss Emily closed the door carefully and said :

"Take a seat by the fire, John—it is a chill morning, and this is a miserably cold house, and we are going to have a long talk. I know Doctor Flinn will keep our brother a good while, John," she said, sitting down on the other side of the high and wide chimney piece, and thus facing her cousin, "I want you to advise us. We do not know what to do."

"About your brother ?" said Mr. Ford.

"Not exactly about him ; but about a young girl with whom he is very much smitten, I am afraid. She is the sister of a rich farmer, who lives thirty miles off. I do not mean to say that Mary O'Flaherty is not a very pretty, pleasing girl, but we do not want her to marry our brother—that is the plain truth of it. Now, I should like to put the case to her in a proper light, but it is awkward, and I thought that you, who are a legal man, might help us."

"Why not argue the matter with your brother ?" suggested Mr. Ford.

"No, no, that would never do," hastily replied Miss Emily. "We must act on Mary O'Flaherty, and on no one else."

Mr. Ford looked abstracted.

"Who is that Mary O'Flaherty?" he asked; "there was a great heiress of the name, was there not?"

"Oh! she is dead," impatiently replied Miss Emily. "This Mary O'Flaherty, who is her cousin, has nothing—not a farthing—nothing but a pretty face and a good temper."

"And the dead one," asked Mr. Ford, "where is she?"

Miss Emily stared.

"Buried, I suppose," she shortly replied.

"But where?"

"Cousin John, you are dreaming. What extraordinary questions you do put! How should I know where the child is buried?"

"Oh! she was a child, then?" persisted Mr. Ford.

"She was a child when our brother met her and her mother in the South of France, and there, I believe, they both died."

"So Mrs. O'Flaherty died in France," thoughtfully observed Mr. Ford. "Emily, where did she die?"

"I don't know," rather impatiently answered Miss Emily. "I dare say our brother knows, but what have we to do with it all? As I was saying, this Mary O'Flaherty——"

"The dead one?" interrupted Mr. Ford.

"John," said Miss Emily, leaning back in her chair, "are you well?"

"Quite well," answered Mr. Ford, and he looked perfectly cool and collected.

"Then what do you keep talking of that dead child to me for?" rather hotly asked Miss Emily, "what have we to do with her?"

"She would have been very rich if she had lived," said Mr. Ford, as if this were sufficient explanation—"she would have had thirty thousand pounds, which have gone to the Georges; and she would have had O'Lally's Town too, Cousin Emily, for it was only in consequence of her death Mr. Gardiner stepped into this property."

The tongs which Miss Emily held dropped from her hand.

"Do tell me what you are driving at," she said a little faintly—"do, John."

"Nothing," he replied, very coolly; "what should I be driving at? I am talking of an old matter which I know well, as those cousins of mine, the Georges, have come into the property. Mary O'Flaherty would have been well off—that is all."

"Well, I hope she is well off. God rest her soul, poor little

innocent," rejoined Miss Emily; "and we have purchased O'Lally's Town from Annie's father, for our brother; and if he would make up his mind to marry Annie, who has land close to his, all would be right; but no, it is all Mary O'Flaherty, and he rides thirty miles to see her; and what are we to do, John?"

"Is he so fond of her?"

"Fond! he adores her, and what can we do?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Ford, quietly: "I have seen enough of Mr. O'Lally to tell you that, if he likes a woman, he will go through fire and water to have her."

Miss Emily looked blank.

"Why, she is poor as Job!" she cried.

"Never mind that—who knows—perhaps Miss Gardiner is not so rich."

He looked very dreamy, and Miss Emily stared at him.

"Why, O'Lally's Town was a handsome estate enough," she said; "and it was only part of her property. Annie is to be what her father was to be—our brother's partner in the factory."

"Have nothing to do with her, Emily; I don't like her eyes—they are not good eyes, Emily."

"They are very handsome eyes, John, and I am really surprised at your remarks."

She looked quite offended; but Mr. Ford persisted in saying he did not like Miss Gardiner's eyes.

"Well, I will tell you what I don't like," hesitatingly replied Miss Emily, lowering her voice; "she walks in her sleep. She does not know it, and we dare not tell her; but Ellen saw her."

"Does she?" said Mr. Ford, looking very little interested; "by-the-bye, Emily, I may as well be open with you—I am short of money just now; you could not lend me five hundred pounds, could you?"

It was with the greatest coolness that Mr. Ford preferred a request so sudden and unexpected that it took Miss Emily's breath away. He saw the impression he had produced, and forced a smile.

"Come, I see it will not do," he said; "never mind, Emily, never mind."

"I am very sorry," deprecatingly said Miss Emily; "and indeed, John, if it were at another time, you should be cordially welcome; but we have just bought this estate, and it is not all

paid for yet, for the rest of our money is embarked in the factory. You know how rare freeholds are—we quite jumped at this, and our dear brother is determined to be both an agriculturist and a manufacturer; and of course he will succeed, though I am sorry to say the country is against him. Doctor Flinn quite frightened me about that Mr. Briggs. Oh! John, I do wish he would marry Miss Gardiner—I mean our brother, not Mr. Briggs, of course.”

“Never mind about the five hundred pounds,” said Mr. Ford, as if this were all he thought of; “I shall manage, I suppose—and if I had suspected your capital was so engaged, I should not have mentioned it.”

He rose as he spoke. At the same moment the door opened, and Mr. O’Lally and Doctor Flinn entered the room. Their conference was over, and Doctor Flinn had come to take his leave of Miss Emily.

“If you will allow it,” said Mr. Ford, “I shall walk with you for a while; I should like a look at the country.”

Doctor Flinn was too courteous and hospitable an Irishman to say that he was riding and not walking. He expressed himself delighted with the proposal, and out they went together. Doctor Flinn, who was quite at home at O’Lally’s Town, signifying to the man-servant, Michael, that he was to precede them with his horse, and wait for them by Shane’s river.

“Fine scenery,” said Doctor Flinn, pointing to the plain bounded by a rocky shore, and skirted by purple mountains, through which they were passing.

“Is this Mr. O’Lally’s land?” asked Mr. Ford.

“I am sorry to say it is.”

Mr. Ford looked surprised; Doctor Flinn resumed in a pathetic tone:

“Do, Mr. Ford, advise that misguided young man. He wants to set up a factory. He is building a factory. How he got round that hard, tight-fisted old Gardiner, whom we buried two months back, no one can tell. He did it; and the factory is building, and he and Miss Gardiner are to be partners, and he will ruin the poor girl, and his poor sisters, two of the kindest, weakest women who ever breathed. Do advise him, Mr. Ford; you are related to them—you are a man of business—you know life; and the boy, the obstinate boy, has no chance; factories do not answer, never will answer in this part of the country.”

“I have already told him so this morning.”

Doctor Flinn’s face fell.

"Oh! you have—have you? Well, I have just been talking with him, and he is as obstinate as ever."

There was a short silence.

"If it were even only one factory," gloomily said Doctor Flinn; "but he has the strangest ideas in his head. Would you believe it, Mr. Ford?—he means to compete with Staffordshire! Yes, you may stare. He says that he has discovered on Miss Gardiner's land—for she has some land adjoining his close to their factory—a large inexhaustible bed of the best porcelain clay. This clay that wise Mr. O'Lally means to turn into cups and saucers made by machinery; and by the use of that machinery, he confidently hopes to drive Staffordshire out of the market. He actually means to have both the home and the export trade—there never was such a dreamer!"

"He will require large capital," said Mr. Ford.

"Thousands, sir, thousands; but bless you, nothing escapes him. He wants to create a watering-place along the coast, and he will have villas where no one ever saw anything but sea-mews. He talks quite plausibly on the subject. I told him that delicate persons would never visit his watering-place, the position being bleak beyond description. 'Bleak!' says he, 'a fir plantation will soon settle that.' And as the side of the mountain happens to be his, he is going to plant it with fir-trees. A misguided young man!"

"Trees take time to grow."

"Of course they do; but that boy does not believe in time.

He acts, sir, as if there were no such a thing."

Another silence followed this remark.

"Then he wants to farm too," ruefully resumed Doctor Flinn. "He has got hold of poor Annie's estate, and wants to farm. It is pitiable! He was reared in Dublin, and I do not believe he knows a pig from a cow. He has not the least idea of farming—he cannot, you know."

Mr. Ford looked at the country. If the land was rich and good, what advantage had been taken of its qualities? Doctor Flinn understood the look, and answered it.

"Well, I do not mean to say old Gardiner was a good farmer. He was too stingy, and farming, we all know, requires a generous heart and an open hand; but this boy will only make bad worse. And then there is Mr. Briggs, the first man in the country; why, he has begun by affronting *him*. You have heard of Mr. Briggs, of course?"

"Never," laconically replied Mr. Ford.

Doctor Flinn looked surprised and almost incredulous, but he had too much innate good-breeding to express the doubts he really felt, and he only said :

"Well, Mr. Briggs is the first man of the country, sir—I might almost say the first man in all Ireland—not that I go with Mr. Briggs in everything, certainly not ; he is decidedly bigoted, intolerant, and despotic ; but for wealth, position, and power, I—I don't know his second, sir, and to think of that boy flying in his face at the first onset. It is pitiable ! And then those two poor sisters, your cousins, are so infatuated about him, that they will throw away every shilling they have to please him ; and he, though he adores them, will ruin them to give them, as he thinks, a fortune. It is a dreadful business, sir, and if you would interfere and advise, it would be a charity."

Mr. Ford thought it odd that all Mr. O'Lally's friends applied to him for assistance, and he concluded, naturally enough, that the young man, with all his smiles and his pleasant looks, must be tolerably obstinate and unyielding. But he, too, had an object in view, and this made him patient. Perhaps Doctor Flinn could assist him.

"I shall see what I can do," he said, "though I have no great hopes—but I came to Ireland on a professional matter, in which you may assist me. Did you happen to know, ten or twelve years back, an extravagant young fellow named Barry ?"

"I knew two ; one who was drowned in Shane's river, and his brother who died in France with his widowed sister, a Mrs. O'Flaherty."

"Indeed ! and did they leave any children—were they married !"

"Not that I know of."

"It is a curious case," confidentially said Mr. Ford, looking hard at Doctor Flinn. "If either of these Barrys had left a male heir, that boy would now be entitled to a handsome English property."

Doctor Flinn looked surprised and incredulous, and asked, "How so ?"

"To tell you the truth, I would rather not enter into particulars," hesitatingly replied Mr. Ford, "I might have half the Barrys in Ireland about my ears ; besides, the secret is none of mine, and the person who has the property now, though anxious to feel certain of a legal title to it, is by no means desirous of fostering idle and vexatious claims, you understand."

"You are quite safe with me," replied Doctor Flinn ; "and

these Barrys were not married, I believe; but suppose there was a private marriage?"

Mr. Ford looked blank.

"I never thought of it," he exclaimed, stopping short.

Doctor Flinn put his finger to his nose and winked.

"I was bred to the law," he said, looking shrewd, "and though I left it for medicine, I know a secret or two."

"What shall I do?" said Mr. Ford.

"I shall help you, sir—I shall help you. I shall inquire. I shall ascertain whether the Barry who was drowned carried out a love affair of his with a farmer's daughter."

"And the other one," suggested Mr. Ford—"the one who died in France."

"Oh! he was safe enough, poor fellow."

But it was precisely about that Barry Mr. Ford seemed most anxious. Was it sure that he was dead—and if so, where did he die?"

"I will not hide from you," he added impressively, "that this is a very important matter, requiring the greatest care and delicacy. There is more than mere money at stake—you understand?"

"Quite well—I shall be as secretive as you can wish."

"I have not mentioned a word to my cousins," continued Mr. Ford—"they are dear good creatures, but they are women."

"Just so," said Doctor Flinn, who had never married, and whom his sister, Miss Flinn, ruled and led completely. "I approve your caution. And now, as this is a matter of business, tell me candidly all you want me to do for you."

"Since you are so very kind," rather eagerly replied Mr. Ford, "I will take you at your word, and request you to favour me with every scrap of information you can get about these Barrys, and especially about the one who died in France. I need not tell a person familiar as you are with the workings of the law, that facts, apparently the most remote from a main object, can be turned to a good account."

"Of course," replied Doctor Flinn; "and here we part, for here is Shane's river, and there is Michael holding my horse, and in a day or two I shall have procured for you all the information you can get in this part of the country."

They had reached a shining little river flowing gently within the shadow of steep mountains and vanishing in a romantic glen. It was a beautiful spot—wild and lonely.

"Is this, too, part of the O'Lally's Town estate?" asked Mr. Ford.

"Of course it is; a very pretty little bit of property that young O'Lally has got there. Well, good-bye. We shall soon meet, you know."

There they parted. Doctor Flinn pleasurably excited at the thought of being mixed up in a matter in which property and character were at stake, and Mr. Ford sad, ashamed, and worn at the part he had been playing.

CHAPTER XI.

THE next day was Sunday.

Mr. Ford had never thought of it till Miss Emily regretted at breakfast that the jaunting car had got damaged, and was not mended yet.

"But, luckily, the chapel is not far, and the day is fine," she added. "Of course, you can walk two miles, Cousin John?"

"Oh! of course I can," replied Mr. Ford, reddening uneasily.

Since his wife's death he had not entered a church or a chapel. He had been careful in deputing Miss Lavinia to attend to the religious instruction of his family, but example they had never had from him. Why he abstained from all the outward forms of religion he had never said, and Mab herself had not dared to question him on this subject—a sensitive one, she felt.

But shame and worldly propriety now conquered Mr. Ford. He was prepared with no excuse, and could not decently stay within.

The day was fine; the walk was not, as Miss Emily said, a long one. It took them through the open country, and as Mr. O'Lally remained with his sisters' cousin, and pertinaciously walked by his side, Mr. Ford, who had had wild thoughts of lingering behind and making his escape, was compelled to walk on and listen. Mr. O'Lally entertained him with an account of the country, which did not seem a flattered one, and with the alterations he meant to effect—and these struck Mr. Ford as rather sweeping as well as numerous.

"And do you expect no opposition?" he said, interested, in spite of other thoughts, in the bold young man's plans.

Mr. O'Lally smiled.

"Plenty," he said; and he resumed his discourse and his projects.

The chapel was reached at length.

Mr. Ford stared, amazed on beholding it. He saw a low, miserable, barnlike building. He looked inquiringly at Mr. O'Lally.

"Come again and look at it a year hence," said the young man, and he stepped back to let Mr. Ford enter.

The interior of the building corresponded to its external appearance. It was poor, bare, and scarcely decent. Extreme poverty and some neglect were marked in all Mr. Ford saw. But perhaps he did not think of that. They were kneeling and praying. He stood, and could not pray. In the early ages of the Church great sinners were forbidden the sanctuary for days, sometimes for years. The murderer, the thief, the libertine were held unworthy, unfit to enter the temple of the living God, unfit to mingle with the faithful within. They might stay without, under the wide porch made wide for them, but they were not to pass the sacred threshold. That barrier of stone which was between them and adoration did not exist for Mr. Ford. The old times were gone, and, besides, who knew his sin?—who could dare and tax him with it? No one. But conscience, though often silent, is often inexorable. She had decreed that John Ford should know peace no more; that the terrors of the other world should haunt him in this, and rob him of the last refuge of the penitent sinner—prayer.

He could not pray—and he could not bear to be where prayers arose from the heart. He looked at his cousins, at Annie Gardiner, at Mr. O'Lally—all reverently bending and absorbed in devotion; he thought that his children, Mab, and his sister were thus engaged at the same hour; unutterable bitterness filled his heart, and turning away abruptly, he left the place and walked home.

The way of the family to the house lay through the garden, and there, on their return, they found Mr. Ford. He was walking with his hands in his pockets, kicking the gravel in the path. He looked up as they approached, and his look was both sheepish and defiant.

"Why, cousin, were you unwell?" cried Miss Emily.

"The place was close," carelessly said Mr. Ford, "and I thought a walk home would do me good."

It was a strange excuse. Wind and rain had but too free an admittance into the poor chapel which Mr. Ford had left so abruptly.

"Close!" said Miss Ellen, amazed.

Her sister pressed her arm gently, and checked the rest. Mr. O'Lally said nothing, but Mr. Ford felt his penetrating eyes observing him quietly.

This incident did what slight incidents often do when the circle in which they occur is a limited one; it chilled its members for the rest of the day. The sisters spoke little; they went to the chapel again in the afternoon, and Mr. Ford alone remained within. It was tacitly felt the chapel would be as close in the evening as it had been in the morning. After dinner Mr. Ford complained of a headache, and thought a walk would do him good. His cousins warmly encouraged him to take one, and Mr. Ford accordingly went out.

He had ascertained during the day that Doctor Flinn's residence was not very far off, and taking the path through the fields that led to it, Mr. Ford now made his way to that gentleman's abode. The long twilight was not yet over when he reached the cottage of Doctor Flinn, whom he found sauntering slowly in a small garden crammed with flowers. They smelt very sweet to Mr. Ford's taste, indeed, there was rather too much of them, but Doctor Flinn was very proud of their beauty, and exclaiming cordially:

"Glad you found me out, Mr. Ford," he hastened to add, "what do you think of my roses?"

"They are very fine, Doctor Flinn."

"Fine! they are splendid. Well, I am glad you came; Miss Flinn will give you a cup of tea, and I have something to tell you; I shall walk home with you—you understand. Come in and see Miss Flinn."

Mr. Ford would rather there had been no such person as Miss Flinn just then; but not being able to prevent her existence, he submitted to it, and entered the parlour where Miss Flinn now sat reading.

Miss Flinn was a woman of fifty. She had a brown, good-humoured face, shrewd and keen, a ready tongue, and her share of ready wit. She had read prodigiously, and seen very little, and the result was an extraordinary compound of breadth and narrowness. She had strong and violent prejudices, which she nursed up carefully as so many virtues, and a habit of putting down people, which, though no doubt pleasant to herself, was not equally so to her friends, and caused Miss Flinn to lead rather a solitary life. Mr. Ford being a stranger, she spared

him on this their first interview, but she was not equally lenient to the members of the little circle he had left.

"Well, it must be a relief to you to leave that old O'Lally's Town," she said, giving him a keen look, "those two silly women have pledged themselves to Miss Gardiner, to see no one whilst she is on a mourning visit to them, and it is a stupid place, if ever there was one."

"Mr. Ford has come to take a cup of tea with us," put in Doctor Flinn.

"Now, Doctor Flinn, don't talk so; Mr. Ford has come because he was sick of his life there. Emily and Ellen are two poor creatures, and their brother is in love——"

Doctor Flinn coughed uneasily.

"Nonsense," said his sister, "he is in love, and though I don't think Mary O'Flaherty worthy of him, she is a much nicer girl than that sullen Annie. It will not do; they may throw them together—silly women!—it will not do."

It was in vain for Doctor Flinn to give Miss Flinn imploring looks, Miss Flinn was bent on talking—and talk she did, until Mr. Ford grew rather impatient. Doctor Flinn had something to tell him, something that he (Mr. Ford) was longing to know, and which rendered him very reckless of Miss Flinn's eloquence or of Mr. O'Lally's love affairs. Scarcely was tea over, when, under the excellent pretence that his cousins would sit up for him, Mr. Ford took his leave. Miss Flinn, who did not often get the chance of a listener, pressed him in vain to stay. Mr. Ford would go, and he went, and Doctor Flinn said he would walk part of the way with him.

Now, if Doctor Flinn was proud of his roses, he was infinitely prouder of Miss Flinn, and

"What do you think of Miss Flinn?" were his first words as soon as they were out of the house. "A remarkable woman, Mr. Ford, but lost here—quite lost and wasted. I don't know a woman like Miss Flinn!"

"Nor do I," answered Mr. Ford, drily.

"Of course you do not—no one does. Fine evening."

It was a fine evening—mild, but dark; stars shone in the depths of the sky, but the moon gave no light.

Mr. Ford for one was glad of it; for he felt his features were not under his control, and might betray him, even to Doctor Flinn's not very penetrating glance.

"Fine evening," said Doctor Flinn, again.

"Yes, a fine evening," vaguely replied Mr. Ford.

"Not that we can see much of the country, eh?" continued Doctor Flinn, jocularly.

Mr. Ford was on thorns at all this delay.

"Well," resumed Doctor Flinn, "have you found out anything?"

"About the Barrys?" suggested Mr. Ford with trembling eagerness.

"Of course. About the Barrys."

"No—nothing; I did not like to inquire, you know."

"Ha, ha! Did not like to inquire." And I suppose you did not guess you were in the very focus of information, if I may so speak."

"Indeed!" faltered Mr. Ford.

"Why, where do you think I went looking for knowledge?" asked Doctor Flinn. "Eh! now just guess."

"I am sure I don't know," hesitatingly said Mr. Ford; "in the neighbourhood, of course."

"In the neighbourhood!" echoed Doctor Flinn; "there's a guess for you. Why, I went to O'Lally's Town, to be sure. To O'Lally's Town, of course."

"O'Lally's Town!" repeated Mr. Ford, apparently much surprised.

"Of course. Who should give me information but Mr. O'Lally! To think that you were under the same roof with the young man who knows most about the Barrys, and that you never suspected it."

Mr. Ford murmured, "It was very strange!"

"Strange, sir! It is one of those coincidences which novelists dare not use in fiction, but which occur daily in actual matter-of-fact life."

"And you learned something?" said Mr. Ford.

"I did this very day. And now, to begin at the beginning. Those Barrys were of an old but impoverished family. There were three of them, two boys and a girl. The men never married, at least it is said so; their sister became a Mrs. O'Flaherty, and was left a young widow with an only child, a girl, you understand."

"I do."

"Well, the elder Barry remained in Ireland, and lived hard till he got drowned in Shane's river. There was a love affair between him and a farmer's daughter—but, mind me, she married before his death."

"Then of course he was not married to her."

"Of course not. And now for the younger Barry. He was delicate, consumptive, in short, and went to the south of France with his sister and her child, and in that country both his sister and himself died within one year. Strange, eh?"

"Yes, very singular."

"Well, not so singular. They were all consumptive, you see. But what is strange, sir, is, that young Mr. O'Lally should have been with them a short time before their decease took place."

"That is very odd," said Mr. Ford; "and what does he know about them?"

"Plenty. He was a boy travelling with his uncle, when they met that Barry and his sister at Montpellier. They were with them for some time travelling together, and little Mary O'Flaherty—I suppose you know who she was?"

"No—I do not; that is to say, I have heard about her," stammered Mr. Ford.

"Why, she was a great heiress, but no one knew anything about that then. Well, she took a great fancy to young O'Lally, and was always in his arms or on his back, and, as I said, the two families travelled together until young Barry was taken alarmingly ill, and died suddenly."

"Where?" eagerly asked Mr. Ford.

"At Cannes, and there he is buried; and, you may rely upon it, he was never married."

"At Cannes!" said Mr. Ford; "and it was there that Mrs. O'Flaherty died, was it not?"

"Oh! no."

"What! she did not die at Cannes?"

"She did not. And what has her death to do with the matter?" asked Doctor Flinn surprised. "She had no claim on the property, had she?"

"No—not that I know of—besides, is she dead?"

"Of course she is; did I not tell you they all three died, young Barry, his sister and her child—a consumptive lot. It was no bad chance for old Gardiner, though, for he came into O'Lally's Town through that child's death. It is a pity he is not living, he could give us some particulars about Barry, not that I think there is anything material to learn."

Doctor Flinn paused, expecting thanks and praise. He got neither. Mr. Ford walked silently by his side; drops of perspiration stood on his forehead. He had been striving for this useless information, in the hope that a grain of precious truth

might mingle with it: and now he was no better off than at the very beginning; and direct questions, from which he shrank with the consciousness of guilty knowledge, seemed his only course—that or silence. At length he took courage.

“Doctor Flinn,” he said, “you quite took me by surprise in mentioning Mr. Gardiner’s name. You do not mean to say he was related to the Barrys?”

“Oh! there is no fear about him! He was only related to them by the mother’s side. The death of little Mary O’Flaherty was a godsend to him, but he could have no claim.”

“And was he with young Barry when he died?”

“Certainly not. He went and fetched the child after the mother’s death, and took her to England, where she died, but he was not with young Barry.”

“Is it certain?” asked Mr. Ford; “he might have been with him—you know such strange things happen.”

“And what if he was, you would not question a dead man—would you?” impatiently asked Mr. Flinn.

Mr. Ford tried to laugh.

“Very good,” he said, “very good. But he went and fetched the child—you grant that.”

“Then it is about the child you are anxious, and not Barry?” suspiciously said Doctor Flinn.

Mr. Ford was dreadfully alarmed. But he tried to say calmly—

“No, the child could have nothing to do with this—nothing whatever. You are quite right. And, indeed, your penetration has been of most valuable assistance to me.”

“Why, you see, I was bred to the law,” complacently replied Doctor Flinn; “and, as you will not mention it, of course, I do not mind telling you that there were some very extraordinary stories about that child and old Gardiner at the time. He went and fetched her in France, where her mother died, and took her to England, and came back here without her; and some time after that came the news of her death, and he was next heir to the estate. Many people did not like that.”

“What name had he?”

“Not a bad one; yet no one trusted him. He was never found out; but he was always suspected. He was a tall, handsome man with silent dark eyes; his daughter has got them, and I don’t know if you have noticed that they are handsome, but by no means pleasant eyes.”

"Very true," said Mr. Ford, "now you mention it, I am quite struck with it. They are decidedly unpleasant eyes."

"Of course they are; but that is not all. I now come to the kernel of this matter. You asked a while ago where Mrs. O'Flaherty died. Now, sir, it is most extraordinary, though no less certain, that to this day no one knows where she did die. She was not on good terms with either her own friends or her husband's, and they made no inquiries, and old Gardiner volunteered no information, and he was not a man whom people questioned, and so no one ever knew it. The child died in England, and he was ready enough to give proof of that, as indeed he was compelled to do by law, I believe; but about the poor mother's death it was noticed he was always silent. Very strange, is it not?"

Mr. Ford remained thunderstruck.

"Do you mean to say no one knows where that lady died?" he exclaimed at length.

"That is just my meaning. A strange thing, sir—a strange thing!"

Mr. Ford could not answer one word. Alas! he saw it all now. His labour was vain, and to all appearance must ever remain so. His own exertions for years, and latterly Captain George's apparently open confessions, had put him in possession of the whole story; only one link was wanting, but it was the first. He did not know where Mrs. O'Flaherty died, and when Mr. Gardiner had received the child. That this fact concealed some carefully hidden discrepancy in that child's subsequent story Mr. Ford was morally certain; but what availed certainty where there was not the shadow of proof? The Georges could prove her birth and her death; how could he even prove that she had been left at his door? The conviction that he had been duped once more by his old enemy—that he had lavished on him some of Mab's money for information which when gained only led him into further expense, exasperated Mr. Ford, not a patient man by nature. It was well for him that the darkness of the night concealed the angry agitation of his features, that Doctor Flinn could not see his quivering lips and his flashing eyes, for he might scarcely have been able to subdue those symptoms of his irritation and disappointment.

"Well, what do you say to that story?" asked Doctor Flinn, surprised, and not well pleased at Mr. Ford's long silence.

"I say that old Gardiner was a villain," replied Mr. Ford,

with vehement indignation—"a villain, and the accomplice of villains like himself."

"Good heavens, man!" cried Doctor Flinn, much alarmed, "you are not going to take away that poor dead man's character, because I repeated to you in strict confidence—mind, in strict confidence—mere rumours—mere idle rumours! Sir!—a villain! Why, sir, there was not a more honest man breathing than that old Gardiner; a pious, charitable man as any ever lived!—and, for God's sake, sir, don't go and blab at O'Lally's Town!"

This pathetic adjuration helped Mr. Ford to recover his self-possession.

"Don't be afraid," he said, "Gardiner and O'Flaherty are all one to me. I know what I wanted to know, and I am much obliged to you for the information you were kind enough to procure me. It is very valuable, I assure you—very valuable—especially when obtained thus discreetly—for of course Mr. O'Lally never suspected the real cause of your inquiries?"

"He suspect! I threw him off the scent, sir—I threw him off the scent. Ha! ha! I knew how to manage. I never mentioned Barry's name. I only brought up the story of the O'Flahertys, and there are reasons why that name sounds very pleasantly in his ears just now. He was quite communicative—told me all about Mrs. O'Flaherty, and was full of little Mary—they were sworn friends, it seems; but I never mentioned Barry, I let him come, sir—I let him come."

"I am much obliged to you, Doctor Flinn," said Mr. Ford, "but I am quite ashamed to have brought you so far out of your way. Why, we are near the house!"

"So we are, and I must not go in—good night."

They shook hands and parted. Doctor Flinn, elated at having got Mr. Ford such valuable information, Mr. Ford depressed to find his journey fruitless. He stood looking at the dark front of the old dwelling, listening to the vague murmurs of the invisible sea, and thinking of Mab. Suddenly a light appeared in a window of the long, low range of the house. Mr. Ford had only time to see that it was on the first floor, and to recognize the tall and slender figure of Miss Gardiner, when the light vanished.

"That was the third window," he thought, "and the third window is in Mr. O'Lally's study, and that is next to my room. What are they doing there? Transacting business?—wait a while—it is not over yet, Miss Gardiner."

In this resentful mood Mr. Ford entered the house. He found his cousins in the sitting-room, and, to his surprise, Mr. O'Lally was with them.

"How is your headache, John?" asked Miss Emily.

"Very bad," replied Mr. Ford, "I think I shall bid you good-night and go to bed."

"Ay, do; poor Annie's head was so bad, too, that she was obliged to go to bed an hour ago."

Mr. Ford's lips opened to say that he had just seen her in Mr. O'Lally's study, but he checked the impulse, for, after all, it might be a servant; and again saying that his head was very bad, he went up-stairs to his room. This was a very dreary apartment on the first floor. It was large, gloomy, scarcely furnished. Mr. Ford, who was chilly, had asked to have a fire in it; the turf was now crumbled away in red fragments. He sat down, and, looking at it dreamily, meditated over the failure of all his plans. "I'll go to France," he thought, rallying a little; "she died there, she was buried there, and there must be traces of her death and burial." As Mr. Ford came to this conclusion, he heard a slight—a very slight—noise on the landing. It might have escaped many a hearing, but his was naturally of the keenest. At once he blew out the light burning on the table near him, and, rising softly, he stealthily approached the door; through its ill-joined chinks several bright gleams of light shot in upon him. Mr. Ford softly opened his door and looked out. The door of Mr. O'Lally's study faced his, and, standing on the threshold of that apartment, appeared Annie Gardiner. She held a lighted wax candle in her right hand. She was pale as death, and her eyes were fixed straight before her, with a cold rigid look. Mr. Ford came forward:

"Miss Gardiner," he asked quietly, "has anything happened?"

She did not answer him. She did not start nor betray any token of recognition, though she passed so close to him that her dark skirts brushed him. She went up the gloomy staircase, steadily holding the light, which shone full on her white face, and never once looking right or left. Mr. Ford watched her until she vanished. A while afterwards he heard a door on the second floor open and close again—then all was still. He softly stole downstairs and listened; Mr. O'Lally was still talking below with his sisters; it was not to speak to him, then, that Miss Gardiner had entered his study.

"And she had a light too," thought Mr. Ford, "very odd—very odd, Miss Gardiner!"

He was going to enter his room, when he suddenly changed his mind and entered that facing it, which was also that which Miss Gardiner had just left. It was a large bare room, not yet fitted up. A bright fire burned on the hearth, and by its light Mr. Ford saw an old Japanned bureau and a deep leather chair facing it. In this chair he sat down, wondering whether he should go and tell Mr. O'Lally what he had seen, or keep his own counsel, for a time at least.

"I think I had better wait," he thought—"I really think I had; perhaps she does walk in her sleep, after all."

Mr. Ford had not much time to perplex himself with this question, for suddenly, though noiselessly, the door opened, and a dark figure entered. It was Annie; he knew her by her height, but this time she carried no light. She seemed to need none. She walked straight to the fireplace, knelt on the hearth, and thrust a paper in the fire. A flame shot up and sent a flickering light in the wide, dark room. A dull, red glow fell on the young girl's pale and rigid face; her eyes were fixed and cold; there was no meaning in her parted lips, marble had more life than Annie Gardiner then. Mr. Ford watched her with breathless attention; he felt convinced that she was acting no part, and he could not check a sort of awe. Suddenly she rose, walked to the door with a firm, sure step—opened it, and closing it again, turned the key outside, and locked Mr. Ford in.

He was too much taken by surprise to overtake or prevent her in time. When he left his chair and sprang to the door, it was fast. He shook it angrily, and, in doing so, ascertained that if there was a key outside there was another key within. He turned it, the door opened, and he stood on the dark and silent landing. He leaned over the banister and listened intently. He still heard voices talking below; above, the house was still as death.

"Mr. O'Lally shall know this to-morrow morning," thought Mr. Ford, perplexed and indignant.

In the meanwhile, he went back to his room, but he could not sleep until morning dawned in the sky; then he fell into heavy slumbers, full of troubled dreams.

CHAPTER XII.

LATE though it was when he fell asleep, Mr. Ford awoke early. He dressed quickly, and leaving his room, at once went

to Mr. O'Lally's, situated on the same floor. The house was wide though low, and every floor had a suite of large gloomy chambers. The ladies, who were timorous, slept upstairs, but Mr. O'Lally's study and bedroom were on the first floor, near Mr. Ford's apartment. Mr. O'Lally had long been up, and he answered Mr. Ford's knock by a brief "Come in." He looked surprised to see him, however. In his blunt way Mr. Ford said:

"May I speak to you. I have something to tell you."

He took a chair, sat down, and began at once.

"Does Miss Gardiner really walk in her sleep?"

"She does; but may I know why you ask?"

"Because I met her coming out of your study last night."

Mr. O'Lally knit his forehead and said—

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and that is not all. I thought I would just enter the room she had left. I had not been there five minutes when the door opened—she came in again, went to the fireplace, burned some papers, and walked out, locking me in. There was a key inside, however, so I could get out. I looked, but Miss Gardiner had vanished."

Mr. O'Lally smiled incredulously.

"And she was asleep?" he said.

"I don't know," drily replied Mr. Ford. "The first time she had a candle, and she looked pale and rigid, the second time she had none."

Mr. O'Lally looked more incredulous than before.

"She does walk in her sleep," he said, "but are you sure it was Miss Gardiner whom you saw?"

Mr. Ford stared and replied rather shortly—

"I saw her as I see you; it was she, and no other. And now allow me too to put a question. Were there any papers in your study Miss Gardiner could take and destroy?"

Mr. O'Lally did not answer this.

"My study was her father's room," he said, coldly; "hence, I suppose, why she visits it in her sleep."

"She came to burn something in it," persisted Mr. Ford.

"Let us see," said Mr. O'Lally. He opened the door, crossed the landing, and entered the study, followed by Mr. Ford, who, looking curiously around him, at once detected a square letter with a red seal on the floor. He picked it up and handed it to Mr. O'Lally, and as he did so his eye caught the name written upon it—"Miss O'Flaherty." Mr. O'Lally took it,

turned it round, put it in his pocket, and opened the bureau. It held nothing but a small pack of letters, which Mr. O'Lally took and counted.

"Everything is as I left it," he said.

"What can she have burned!" exclaimed Mr. Ford, evidently disappointed.

Mr. O'Lally glanced at the fireplace. He could see no trace of anything having been burned in it save turf. Not the least shrivelled scroll remained in the ashes; and though he did not say so, he began to suspect that Mr. Ford had dreamed or invented the whole story.

"I cannot understand it," significantly said Mr. Ford.

"Nor can I," as significantly replied Mr. O'Lally.

It was now breakfast time, and they went down to a very bare room, which was called the dining-room, and in which they found the twin sisters.

Miss Gardiner's place was vacant.

"Where is Annie?" asked Mr. O'Lally, sitting down.

"I don't know," replied Miss Emily. "I wonder what ails her. She is never so late."

The door opened as she spoke, and Miss Gardiner entered. They were all struck with her pallor.

"My dear," cried Miss Ellen, "are you unwell?"

"I am not very well," replied Miss Gardiner, in a low voice, "but nothing particular ails me."

She sat down as she spoke, and drank the tea Miss Emily had silently poured out; but her trembling hand could scarcely raise the cup to her lips. Mr. O'Lally looked at her compassionately; her eyes were wild, her features had nervous twitchings. Ay, she was very unwell indeed!

"What is the matter?" cried Miss Ellen.

"Nothing, indeed," answered Miss Gardiner, endeavouring to look composed. "I had a dreadful dream, that was all."

It was plain she would give them no further explanation, for when Miss Ellen curiously said, "A dream! oh! do tell it us, my dear!" Miss Gardiner shivered slightly, and replied, "Pray do not ask. It is still too vivid."

Mr. O'Lally rose as soon as breakfast was over, and went out into the garden. He had not walked far, when he heard a light step running behind him; he looked round and saw Annie; she signed him to stop, and he did so at once.

"I must speak to you a few minutes," she said, as she came up to him, still panting for breath.

"Would you not rather sit than walk?" kindly asked Mr. O'Lally.

"No, thank you."

"Well, but take my arm at least."

She passed her arm through his, and looked fixedly at him, whilst her eyes fast filled with tears, but she did not speak.

"What is it?" he asked gently, "is it the dream?"

"That and other things," she answered sadly; but, shaking her tears away, she resumed, "I have never been happy, as you know, and sometimes the old bitterness will arise; for if I suffered formerly, now I am alone."

"You need not remain so," said Mr. O'Lally, with a smile; "I need not tell you that no young and handsome woman, who is rich as well as handsome, need remain alone. Do as I am going to do, Annie—marry."

"I dare say I shall in time," calmly answered Miss Gardiner; "but if you have found a Mary O'Flaherty, I have found no one. Believe me, however, I rejoice at your better fortune, and wish you both every happiness."

She spoke in a low tone, with downcast eyes, but with perfect composure.

"And the dream?" said Mr. O'Lally.

"It was not a dream," she whispered; "trust me with nothing—I have lost the five hundred pounds you gave me on Saturday—I missed them this morning, and, what is worse, Mr. O'Lally, I have not the least suspicion how I did lose them."

Mr. O'Lally was startled. Was Mr. Ford's story true, after all? But he could not tell Annie that she walked in her sleep. She did not know it—she was never to know it.

"Where had you put the notes?" he asked.

"In my desk; and here is the key, which never leaves me."

She showed him a small plain key, by no means a safe one, suspended to her jet chain. A terrible suspicion, involuntary and keen, crossed Mr. O'Lally's mind. How could those notes have vanished? Was it for that Mr. Ford came home from the chapel—was it for that he told that strange story of Annie's visit to his study? He had always suspected that man; had he cause so good and cogent for his suspicion? He questioned Miss Gardiner closely, but he could learn nothing from her, save that she put the notes in her desk on the Saturday and did not open it till this morning, when she at once missed them.

"Never mind," cheerfully said Mr. O'Lally, "the notes are

not lost, they are only astray ; and now excuse me, I remember something I want to say to Emily."

Miss Gardiner remained in the garden. Mr. O'Lally, with whom suspicion never tarried, went in at once to seek his sister. He found her in the dining-room, alone and thoughtful.

"I am very anxious about Annie," she said ; "that dream of hers must have been dreadful. Dreams affect one so ; besides, Annie has been in a very excitable state of late. Have you not noticed it ?"

Mr. O'Lally replied that he had, and, looking round, inquired where Mr. Ford was.

"I don't know—in his room, I believe. Do you want him ?"

"I only wanted to know whether he was within hearing."

"My dear brother !"

"Emily, I must be honest with you—I mistrust Mr. Ford."

"My dear brother !"

"Now just tell me this, Emily, has he attempted to borrow money from you ?"

Miss Emily reddened.

"He has, but surely there is no harm in that. It seems, poor fellow, he is hard pushed, and that he came here hoping we could let him have five hundred pounds."

"Five hundred !"

"It is a large sum ; but I believe we have the name of being rich. However, when I explained to him it was impossible, he understood at once, and said no more on the subject."

"I put the question," resumed Mr. O'Lally, "not out of curiosity, but because I am sorry to say that Mr. Ford has not the name of a safe man. I have met Mr. George, his eldest son's employer, and though he grew suddenly cautious on learning that I was connected with Mr. Ford through you, he had said enough to make me feel uneasy. And then, what is his domestic history ? What was his wife ? I heard—I hope it is not true that she died of a broken heart, and that the child whom he found at his door is strongly suspected to be his."

"His wife," answered Miss Emily, a little warmly, "was a proud, cold beauty, whom I never liked, and I do not think, my dear brother, that she had a heart to break. As to the child, I trust and hope he took her in out of pure Christian charity."

"I hope so too," calmly rejoined her brother ; "and whether he did or not, that is no business of ours ; but mind my words, Emily, that man has come here, and is staying here for a purpose that is not friendly."

Miss Emily looked almost frightened, and, turning to her brother, seemed to ask for an explanation, but Mr. O'Lally gave her none. He had said as much as he wished to say on this subject, and having said it, he left her.

"It is he who has them," he thought, as he returned to the garden. He hoped to find Annie there, but instead of her he met Mr. Ford, who was lying in wait for him. He was lounging in one of the alleys, his hands thrust in his pockets, his eyes wandering carelessly around him. On seeing Mr. O'Lally, he stopped and stood waiting till the young man came up; he then walked by his side, and said a little eagerly:

"Well—it is odd—is it not?"

"What is odd?" asked Mr. O'Lally.

"Miss Gardiner's dream."

"She did not tell it."

"Just so. She did not tell it."

"And what is your inference?" asked Mr. O'Lally, stopping short.

"That she was not ready with a dream," shrewdly replied Mr. Ford.

Mr. O'Lally looked thoughtful. Mr. Ford could not keep in his triumph at his own sagacity.

"You see," he said, "I am up to all those things. It is very difficult to deceive me, and they who did it once," he added, as a resentful memory of the past shot across his mind, "may repent it ere they die. Now, are you sure you have lost no papers, no valuables?"

"I have already told you so. Excuse me if I walk on fast—I am in a hurry."

"Oh! I can keep up with you," replied Mr. Ford, who had no suspicion that Mr. O'Lally wanted to get rid of him.

"I confess this matter interests me greatly—I should like to help you to fathom it." Mr. O'Lally could scarcely keep in. "I watched her during breakfast time," continued Mr. Ford, absorbed in his own cogitations, "and she looked conscious and unhappy. Now, I have had plenty of experience, and I know that persons who walk in their sleep never do remember what has passed."

Mr. O'Lally bit his lip. Mr. Ford's impudence or his penetration was getting very troublesome. He was glad to find, however, that they had reached the end of the garden, and that his companion showed no inclination to accompany him fur-

ther. Indeed, Mr. Ford took care, as they parted, to inform him that he would remain at home all day on the watch.

"That man is either a villain or a fool!" indignantly thought Mr. O'Lally. "Who can believe his wild story of Annie walking in her sleep with a candle in her hand, leaving my study, coming back to it, burning papers and the rest. He has stolen her five hundred pounds, wants me to think they are destroyed, and does not know what to invent."

He rapidly matured his plans as he walked on, and, by coming home to luncheon, with him an unusual occurrence, he gave them prompt execution.

"My dear brother, does your head ache?" asked Miss Emily, struck with the gravity of his looks, and using the boldest form of questioning she could venture to employ with her brother.

"No, thank you," he replied; "but I have had a loss.

"A loss!"

The two sisters at once looked anxious.

"Yes. I miss five hundred pounds in notes."

Miss Emily looked aghast.

"You have been robbed?" she cried.

"I do not say so; but the notes are astray. However, I know the numbers, and have taken every necessary step; for they might fall into the wrong hands, you know."

He looked at Mr. Ford keenly, but without affectation. Mr. Ford did not heed the look; his shrewd brown eyes were fastened full on Annie Gardiner, who could scarcely conceal her agitation.

"And is it here the notes are astray?" timidly asked Miss Ellen; "I mean in this house? Because we might look, you know."

Mr. O'Lally smiled.

"The notes may be in this house," he said; "but it is useless for you to look, my dear Ellen; they cannot be where you would seek."

Miss Ellen ventured to say no more, and there the matter ended. When luncheon was over the ladies rose and left the room, a useless ceremonial; Mr. O'Lally was the most sober of men, and Mr. Ford for ten years had drunk nothing but water at his meals. He at once plunged eagerly into the matter of which his thoughts were full.

"Have you really got the numbers of the notes?" he asked.

"Of course I have. Why so?"

"Miss Gardiner and I met in the garden, and she asked me what steps should be taken in such a case as this."

Mr. O'Lally could not repress a start.

"Then it was she who lost the notes!" shrewdly exclaimed Mr. Ford.

"To tell you the truth, it was," answered Mr. O'Lally, very much vexed at Annie's imprudence, but feeling that concealment was useless.

"I told you so this morning, mind, I told you she had taken something. Bless you, Mr. O'Lally, it is next to impossible to deceive and outwit me."

"I perceive it is very difficult," replied Mr. O'Lally, with an irony Mr. Ford did not detect.

"And I will tell you more," continued Mr. Ford; "the notes are not burned as you might suppose. Depend upon it, Miss Gardiner did not burn the notes last night—though, may be, she thought she did."

This remark Mr. Ford uttered with a sceptical tone he would not subdue; for his prejudice against Annie increased every moment, and, as usual, he expressed his gratification by a sort of vulgar smacking of his lips, which was, with him, an old and confirmed habit. It was impossible for Mr. O'Lally not to understand Mr. Ford's meaning; he covertly accused Annie of having taken the five hundred pounds; but much as he resented this accusation, he would not put Mr. Ford on his guard by understanding or repelling it, and externally he remained cool and unmoved.

"Suppose we sit up in your study to-night and watch for her," suggested Mr. Ford. "She may come again and put them back, you know."

The proposal suited Mr. O'Lally exactly, and he accepted it. It was possible, after all, that Miss Gardiner had hidden the notes in her sleep, and that in her sleep she might reveal to the watchers where she had put them. There could be no harm in trying, and it was but fair to Mr. Ford to do so. On this agreement they parted. Mr. O'Lally went out as usual; Mr. Ford, contrary to his habit, remained within, and unless when Miss Gardiner went into the garden, did not stir out of the house.

Whilst Miss Emily was in a state of deep mental distress at the five hundred pounds her brother missed, and the five hundred pounds Mr. Ford had wanted to borrow, an unfortunate coincidence which distracted her, and, spite all her efforts, led her on

the verge of the sin of rash judgment, Mr. Ford was trying to the utmost the patience of Miss Gardiner. Eager in his suspicion, and incautious as he too often was, he did not let the unfortunate young lady out of his sight. If she sat with the twin sisters, he sat and watched her stealthily, pretending, indeed, to be reading the newspaper, but not losing one of her movements. If she went into the garden, he sauntered out after her. If, becoming painfully conscious of the scrutiny to which she was subjected, Annie took refuge in her room, Mr. Ford went up to his and stayed in it, with the door ajar, until she came down again, when he immediately followed her, trying to look careless, but acting his part very indifferently. Even Miss Ellen, though not of an observant turn, was struck with the strangeness of his behaviour, and wondered to her sister what could ail John, a remark which only further distracted Miss Emily, and, to use her own phrase, "upset her still more."

Mr. Ford, however, with that sad mixture of blindness and shrewdness which characterized him, only saw the fever and agitation of Annie, which he thought extremely suspicious, and never perceived the natural mistrust excited by the singularity of his own behaviour. His mind, entirely bent on one object, her detection, lost sight of all else. When evening came, and Mr. O'Lally returned to dinner, he went out to meet him in the garden, and to say, with his imprudent eagerness,

"I have been watching all day, but I could find out nothing—nothing."

And he smacked his lips as if to have found out nothing were yet something to boast of.

"We shall see to-night," said Mr. O'Lally quietly.

The evening passed without incident of any kind. Doctor Flinn came in, spent an hour with the family, and left early. Annie Gardiner, who looked very pale and ill, at once went up to her own room, and Mr. Ford discovered that he was very sleepy, and went up immediately after her. He sat up till twelve, when Mr. O'Lally, as had been agreed, came up and joined him.

They went to the study together, and waited there. Mr. Ford seemed in great glee. It was quite an adventure, and he enjoyed it. He stirred the fire, he trimmed the candle, he left his chair and came back to it, and, to Mr. O'Lally's annoyance, it took him a quarter of an hour to settle down to calmness. After this, indeed, he remained quiet enough, and sat patiently waiting. This vigil, in which he seemed to have no

concern, interested him deeply. He had been watching Annie Gardiner the whole day, and never had her handsome dark eyes pleased him less. They were fine eyes, indeed, but too subtle for so young a girl. There was a melancholy in their depths that seemed to bespeak compassion and indulgence, for it told of much sorrow. Mr. Ford knew, too, through Miss Emily, that Annie, though an only child, had trembled before her father, a harsh man to all, to her doubly severe. The sadness of her countenance confirmed the story. But it was not pity, it was dislike he felt for Miss Gardiner. She was one of the obstacles who stood between him and the aim of his life, and in his heart he longed to make her atone for the wrong of which she was unconscious. She was innocent—but Mr. Ford was not generous enough to forgive her the sin of her birth—besides, there was something secretively restless about her, which annoyed and irritated him. She scarcely spoke, her motions were silent, yet nothing seemed so foreign to this young girl as repose, nothing more remote from her nature than the calmness of innocent youth. With morbid and almost vindictive eagerness, he now sat with Mr. O'Lally, feeling sure that they would detect her. But nothing came of this long vigil. The house was deeply quiet, the very sea seemed silent, the western wind was hushed, and nothing stirred within or without. Mr. O'Lally looked at his watch, and rose.

"It is four," he said, "I shall detain you no longer."

"I am afraid she will not come," replied Mr. Ford, evidently disappointed.

Mr. O'Lally treasured up this admission of fear, but took no notice of it. He again said he would detain Mr. Ford no longer, and each retired to his own room.

"She was too cunning for me," thought Mr. Ford, as he closed his door, "I suppose she knew we were there."

He went to his bed, and as usual put his watch under his pillow; as he did so he felt something rustle, he lifted the pillow quickly and saw a packet of banknotes lying beneath it. Mr. Ford stared at the notes as he still held the pillow in his hand. Who had put them there?—Annie, of course! But when? His mind rapidly flew over the whole day; he had ceased watching her only when he went to meet Mr. O'Lally in the garden before dinner. She was not asleep then—the inference was obvious; it was not in a fit of somnambulism that the notes were put there.

"Did she want to put the theft upon me?" thought Mr. Ford, angrily; "that would be like her father's daughter."

Mr. Ford's first indignant impulse was to go and knock at Mr. O'Lally's door and show him his discovery; and had he done so he would have given his innocence the chance of a doubt in Mr. O'Lally's mind. But little as he liked Miss Gardiner, he could not, when the moment came, help wishing to spare her the shame of exposure; for he never doubted but his word would be believed.

"Let her escape this time," he thought, "she knows she could not outwit me, and I shall give her a hint before going—it will be a lesson to her."

With this merciful consideration Mr. Ford went to bed, and lost his last chance with Mr. O'Lally.

CHAPTER XIII.

SCARCELY did Miss Emily see her brother entering the dining-room, where her sister and Mr. Ford had already come down to breakfast on the morning that followed the vigil, than she exclaimed a little eagerly—

"My dear brother, I have been thinking about these notes——"

"I have found them," interrupted Mr. O'Lally, sitting down.

Every one looked surprised.

"Yes," he resumed, "I have just found them in my study."

His tone implied a dislike of all comments, and none were made aloud at least.

Mr. Ford, who knew how the missing property had been restored, looked curiously at Annie across the table. She was calm and composed, but it seemed to him that she shrank a little nervously from that steady, searching glance.

"Any messages for Dublin and London," he said, abruptly addressing his cousins—"I am going away this morning."

He spoke to the Miss Fords, but it was Annie he looked at. There was a sudden clearing of her countenance, which she could not conceal, but only a watchful eye could detect it—so slight was it, so quickly gone.

"Not this morning!" cried the two sisters in a breath—"not this morning, Cousin John!"

"This very morning," answered Mr. Ford, coolly. "My

carpet-bag is packed, and I can easily walk to the stage-coach. It is only a few miles."

Protests, entreaties were vain alike. Mr. Ford was resolved on going, and he carried his resolve into effect as soon as breakfast was over.

Mr. O'Lally could not, would not hide the coldness with which he saw the cousin of his sisters depart; and Mr. Ford was so far from suspecting this, that he took a great deal of unnecessary pains in shunning every opportunity of talking privately with Mr. O'Lally.

He did not like Miss Gardiner, he was convinced of her guilt, but he pitied her for all that, and he still meant to give her a friendly warning before he left. But unless he asked to speak to her in private, which was impossible, Mr. Ford found that he could not hope to say one word to this young lady. She clung to Miss Emily as closely as Miss Emily's own shadow, and when the two sisters said they would walk part of the way with their cousin—the servant-man was to carry the carpet-bag—Miss Gardiner, though she was not fond of pedestrian exercise, at once said she would go with them.

"My dear, it will fatigue you," cried Miss Ellen, surprised, "you never walk."

"It will do me good;" said Miss Gardiner, reddening a little, for even Mr. O'Lally seemed astonished at her resolve. Miss Emily objected too, but Miss Gardiner still persisting that the walk would do her good, the morning being so fine, no further opposition was made.

In the coldest speech which politeness allows, Mr. O'Lally regretted that, not knowing Mr. Ford meant to leave that morning, he had made an appointment and must remain at home.

"Never mind," said Mr. Ford, in his warm, cordial way; "never mind, only come and see us in London, that's all."

Mr. O'Lally smiled, and neither declined nor accepted the offer. He felt plenty of contempt for, but no resentment against Mr. Ford; it was all clear to him now—he had come for money, ready to borrow, to take even, if the opportunity fell in his way; and ready to depart without ceremony or shame when his object was detected or defeated: "Let him go," he thought, as he stood on the threshold of the house watching the party going down the garden; "only let neither him nor his ever be found under this roof again."

Poor Mr. Ford! utterly unconscious of the terrible suspicion too much zeal in Miss Gardiner's and Mr. O'Lally's affairs had

made him incur, he was then only thinking how best he might ward off the dark cloud he saw hanging over O'Lally's town. Mr. O'Lally himself he could not meddle with. The young man was too penetrating and too keen to receive hints and explanations which Mr. Ford dare not give; Miss Gardiner shunned him, and clung to Miss Emily; and Miss Ellen was no one. To Emily, however, Mr. Ford was resolved on speaking: and as he was never one to stand much on form, he gently parted the two ladies, who were walking arm-in-arm, saying, as he did so:

"By your leave, Miss Gardiner, I have a few words to say to my cousin before we part."

Miss Gardiner turned so pale, that even Miss Emily noticed it.

"What ails you?" she cried; "is it the walking?"

"I believe it is—I don't know—I shall go on a little farther and see."

She fell in the rear, and walked by Miss Ellen.

"I am quite uneasy about that girl," said Miss Emily; "she has not been herself these several days past."

"She will get better after I am gone," replied Mr. Ford, rather sarcastically; "and to tell you the truth, Emily, it is about her I wish to speak. Is your brother resolved on marrying Miss O'Flaherty?"

"I believe he is—a great trouble to us."

"Nonsense, let him marry her—and bless your stars he does not take Miss Gardiner."

"My gracious!—why so, John?"

"She is handsome, and I daresay rich; but if I were you, I should not like him to marry her."

"But why so?" again asked Miss Emily; "why her land and my brother's join?"

"Never mind. She walks in her sleep, Emily, she walks in her sleep. People who walk in their sleep do very strange things. I really think that bad, I do."

Miss Emily wanted to question him again, but Mr. Ford would say no more.

"Good-bye," he said, stopping short. "Good-bye, cousin. Miss Gardiner is tired, and you have come far enough. Michael will carry my carpet-bag, and I can do without you."

He was determined on going on alone, and they were compelled to humour him. Miss Emily, however, could scarcely conceal her displeasure at seeing a guest and cousin go off in this unceremonious fashion, even on foot, with a carpet-bag, and

without even the convenience of the jaunting-car, which was still under repair. Mr. Ford laughed.

"You and Livy would go well together," he said; "I shall send you Livy one of these days."

"Do," cordially cried Miss Emily.

"And Mab, too," said Mr. Ford.

"Do," said Miss Emily, again, but not quite so cordially, for she was a great stickler for birth and pure blood.

"Agreed," resumed Mr. Ford, shaking them both by the hand, and forgetting Miss Gardiner; "only it may not be just yet. Good-bye once more."

He left them as he spoke, and though they called out another adieu, he went on at a brisk pace, and never looked round. Miss Gardiner watched him till he was out of sight; then breathed a deep sigh. The sisters asked how she felt.

"Much better," she replied, smiling, and she did look much better indeed.

"It is very odd," said Miss Ellen, as they turned homewards; "but do you know, though I like John, and was glad to see him, I feel almost happy he is gone. There seemed something wrong whilst he was here, and now I am relieved like, and think it over."

"Wrong? what wrong?" said Miss Emily.

"I don't know—but there was something; our brother was so odd—even Annie was not herself."

"I?" cried Miss Gardiner.

"Yes, my dear. Of course it was the presence of a total stranger—but still, I assure you, you were quite different. And I must say, John has strange ways; he was watching you yesterday so oddly, and our brother seemed to be watching him. I assure you I felt uncomfortable."

"We are not accustomed to strangers," said Miss Emily; "why bless me, there is Doctor Flinn!"

It was indeed that gentleman himself who now came riding towards them, and who gallantly alighted to have, as he said, the pleasure of walking with such a galaxy of beauty. Of this galaxy, it so happened that Miss Emily alone remained by his side, for Miss Gardiner was gathering wild flowers, and Miss Ellen was helping her.

"What news?" asked Doctor Flinn.

"We have just been seeing John off."

Doctor Flinn stopped short and looked amazed, as he was indeed. Mr. Ford had gone without taking leave of him!

"It was a sudden departure," quickly said Miss Emily; "he begged to be kindly remembered to you, and was extremely sorry he could not go round and take leave of you this morning."

Doctor Flinn looked cool and important.

"I regret it," he said; "I regret it. Mr. Ford was an agreeable sort of man. Very."

Miss Emily looked stiff, and her pride of kindred came out in her rejoinder.

"I don't agree with you, Doctor Flinn. John is not agreeable to my taste; there is something decidedly blunt and unpleasant about him; but then he is a first-rate man of business, I suppose."

"Indeed, I would advise you to suppose no such thing, Miss Emily," plainly said Doctor Flinn; "he is not secretive—he cannot keep his own counsel. Now, in the law a man must know how to keep his mind to himself. You understand? He must make others work for him, actually, without their own knowledge! And this your cousin Mr. Ford cannot do!—he actually laid himself bare to me, almost a total stranger, with a facility which, if I were his client, I should consider deplorable. Why, if I liked, Miss Emily, I could just send a paragraph to a newspaper and expose a great English family to obloquy and ridicule. Of course it would be abominable and ungentleman-like; but in the law, Miss Emily, in legal matters, the words honour, and gentleman, and confidence are unknown, Miss Emily."

Doctor Flinn came to this conclusion with his natural good-humour, and leniently forgot Mr. Ford's sins. Miss Emily's surprise at length found vent in words.

"My gracious! Doctor Flinn, what are you talking about?"

Doctor Flinn laid his forefinger to his nose, and turning to Miss Ellen and Miss Gardiner, who now came up, he complimented that young lady, albeit no great favourite of his, on her blooming appearance.

Annie looked more than blooming. She looked like one from whom a weight of care has been removed—like one who has fought a hard battle, and come forth triumphant.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Richmond excursion had only been a few days over, when Mab discovered they should give a party. Miss Lavinia spoke of the expense; but were not forty pounds inexhaustible wealth?

The first thing was to get a few girls: as well have a garden without roses as a party without girls.

"We must make sure of Anna and Laura Shaw," said Mab.

To get these young ladies, it was necessary to call upon the aunt with whom they lived in the neighbourhood of London; and this Mab and Miss Lavinia lost no time in doing.

"What shall we do if they are out of town, or cannot come?" anxiously exclaimed Mab, as the cab drove up to Mrs. Shaw's door; but out of town Anna and Laura were not, for through the bars of the iron gate Mab saw them walking in the garden, and was seen by them. They ran to her with a joyful cry, and brightened up on hearing her errand.

"We are going to have a dance next Thursday; can you come?"

"Aunt will not let us," despondently replied Laura; "she is so cross to-day."

"Yes, she will," answered the more hopeful Anna; "she must let us go—we go nowhere."

A sober footman in the meanwhile ushered the ladies to the presence of Mrs. Shaw, a lady of fifty, who had recently married a young man of twenty-five related to her late husband, and who, though he had no present occupation, was, in Mrs. Shaw's own words, "destined to be an ornament to the Church."

Mrs. Shaw received Miss Lavinia and Mab very kindly, lent a favourable ear to Mab's request, and was even so good as to declare that she and Mr. Shaw would accompany the young ladies.

"Shall we not, Mr. Shaw?" she added, turning to that gentleman, who sat extending his full length in a deep arm-chair.

"Certainly," drawled Mr. Shaw; "I shall be most happy to accompany you, my love."

Here Anna and her sister drew Mab aside to a whispered consultation concerning what they should wear, which consultation ended in a request that she would come up and inspect their wardrobe. In the meanwhile, Mr. and Mrs. Shaw resumed a quarrel which the entrance of the visitors had interrupted.

"Would you believe it, Miss Ford!" exclaimed Mrs. Shaw,

"just before you came in, Mr. Shaw actually put me beside myself. My basket-man came with the loveliest basket. Why, there he is again in the lane. Mr. Shaw, do ask him if he will take two-and-six for that basket. I know you can get it for me if you will only exert yourself."

Mr. Shaw, either on account of the compliment, or because he really enjoyed bargaining as sport, or again, because he had a dimple in his chin, and was on the main extremely good-natured, rose, languidly stretched his long legs, and, lolling half out of a window which looked out on a lane, opened a conversation with the basket-man.

"How much will you take for it?" he asked.

"How much will you give?" was the reply.

"Two-and-six."

"Make it three, sir."

"Two-and-six, and be d—— to you!" was the answer which escaped the lips of this future ornament of the Church, with which he drew in his head and sank back on his seat.

"Mr. Shaw, you deed," said Mrs. Shaw; "you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mr. Shaw!"

"I," he answered, with the greatest composure; "I never swear—never!"

"Miss Ford, you heard him. I know you must have heard him; he deed—I know he did—did he not?"

But without giving Miss Ford time to answer this embarrassing question, Mrs. Shaw went on, absorbed in her wrongs.

"I know he did it on purpose. I know he did not want me to have that basket, just because I had set my mind upon it. Now, I put it to you, Miss Ford, if Mr. Shaw had any regard for me, he would have offered the man two-and-nine; but now the man is gone, and I shall never see another such basket, and some one else will get it—Mrs. Reed wants it, I know."

"The devil take the basket and all basket buyers!" angrily exclaimed Mr. Shaw.

"Mr. Shaw, you are an unfeeling wretch to wish the devil to take your own wife, to whom you owe everything, from the coat you wear to the bread you eat. I am sure you are going to the devil yourself as fast as you can, though what he will do with you it puzzles me to know," kindly added Mrs. Shaw, "a long-legged, lazy fellow!"

These amenities of domestic life were sweet as daily bread to Mr. and Mrs. Shaw, who literally lived upon them; but they

thoroughly frightened Miss Ford, who, rising in a great hurry, nervously wondered where her niece was.

"You surely are not going," cried Mr. and Mrs. Shaw, in a breath, for, not being troubled with superfluous delicacy, they rather relished the presence of a witness.

"Thank you, I am pressed for time," replied Miss Ford; "may I trouble you—oh! here she is! My dear Mab, we must be going."

And scarcely giving her time to bestow a parting embrace on her friends, Miss Ford hurried Mab into the cab, and breathed a sigh of relief as it drove away.

"Such a disreputable pair!" she exclaimed; "I never met with, never. My dear Mab, they may be very nice girls, but you really cannot have them at the party."

"But, aunt, they are coming."

"My dear, you did not hear what I heard—I tell you, it is out of the question."

Miss Ford was so unusually excited, that Mab prudently waited until she had calmed down to argue with her. Then, indeed, though not without some trouble, she succeeded in convincing Miss Lavinia that the invitation could not be withdrawn.

"I suppose not," despondently replied Miss Lavinia; "but pray, my dear, never do ask that Mr. Shaw any more."

Mab gravely promised she would not, and immediately on her return home began the preparations for the party.

The drawing-rooms, being Mr. Ford's, could not be disturbed. The parlours, therefore, had to be cleared out, and the folding-doors to be taken down, and the carpets taken up exactly two weeks after they had undergone that operation.

"We cannot dance on carpets, aunt," said Mab; "think of the dust!"

Miss Lavinia sighed, and yielded. The carpets, on being taken up, showed many a weak spot.

"Oh! Mab," cried Miss Lavinia, with another sigh, "we might new carpet the floor with what that party will cost."

But Mab's prudence was not equal to such a sacrifice. The party she must and would have, and the more trouble it gave her the better she liked it. At length the happy evening came round. William declared that the rooms looked beautiful, and Mab and he had indeed done their best. The garden had been stripped of its flowers to fill the vases; the grates were filled with the loveliest grasses which Mab had brought from Richmond, red velvet benches, and a piano completed the furniture, and

wax-lights in bronze sconces lit the scene over which Mab presided, attired in virgin white, and looking, William declared, "just like an angel."

No one had arrived yet when Robert came down. Mab surveyed him in the looking glass, and could not help admiring him. He was very handsome and gentlemanlike, and "he is mine," thought Mab with secret satisfaction. Robert, who was drawing on his white kid gloves, eyed Mab with similar feelings. She looked very charming, and she was, or would be his. It was decidedly agreeable to have this sort of property coming in to him some day; unluckily he chose to extend his jurisdiction over it at once, and in a manner which was not pleasant to Mab.

"Mab," he said, still fitting on his gloves, "you will not waltz with Frederick, of course."

"I promised him the second waltz last night," she replied, very composedly.

Robert looked amazed.

"The second waltz!" he echoed. "Once for all, Mab, I beg you to understand that you are to waltz with no one but with me."

Habitual respect for Robert alone checked Mab's reply; but her cheeks burned with indignation. Robert, confident of victory, did not choose to pursue his advantage by giving her a lecture—indeed, he had not time to do so, a knock was heard, and the first visitors arrived. They proved to be Anna and Laura, without either their aunt or Mr. Shaw. Mab looked surprised.

"We ran away!" giggled the two sisters in a breath.

"Ran away?"

"Yes, aunt and Mr. Shaw began quarrelling just as we were ready. Mr. Shaw was savage because the rice pudding broke, and aunt burst into tears, and said she would go to bed and there should be no party—so, when we saw this we got into the cab and drove off."

"Shan't we get it when we go home, though?" was Annie's comfortable reflection.

Mab professed her pleasure to have them any way, and Laura looked at Robert, who had discreetly walked away, with disinterested admiration.

"How well Mr. Robert Ford looks!" she said softly.

"Yes, he is not amiss," carelessly said Mab.

"Amis!" the two sisters were shocked at such heresy. Why, he was quite handsome, and so gentlemanlike.

"You must see Frederick Norton," said Mab, still careless. More knocks now came at the door. Friends of Robert's—then

Frederick, his sister and Mrs. Norton. Whilst Anna and Laura looked at Frederick, Mab gave Ellen a rapid glance, on which followed a sudden blush.

There was no concealing the fact from herself. Mab was not to be queen that night. Ellen Norton was attired from head to foot in delicate rose colour, and she looked terrestrial indeed, but extremely lovely. Her dark hair and eyes, her charming neck and shoulders, had a southern warmth and grace which matched the blooming roses in her bosom. She was life, youth, and beauty, and Mab, though too proud to be envious, was woman enough to resent being effaced.

"What a sweet girl!" whispered Anna. "But we do not admire her brother at all. How *could* you compare him to Mr. Robert Ford?"

Mab did not answer. She was watching Mr. Robert Ford, and it seemed to her that he thought Miss Ellen Norton a very sweet girl indeed. He looked at her, talked to her, laughed with her, and finally, when the dancing began, he danced with her almost to the exclusion of any one else. Politeness, no doubt, required some of this behaviour, but politeness, thought Mab, might have made him attentive to her friends Anna and Laura, and for once Robert was not so. He left them to the charity of his brothers, and Mab to his friends and Frederick and Mr. Shaw. For here is the place to remark, that scarcely had the dancing begun when Mr. Shaw made his appearance, all smiles and sweetness; and that scarcely had he taken Mab for his partner, when a cab stopped at the door, and Mrs. Shaw entered the ball-room, in a low dress, and with a wreath of roses in her hair; the whole of which took place to the no small trepidation of poor Miss Lavinia, as she sat at the piano kindly playing quadrilles.

But her music and the pleasure of the young people were both doomed to a third and more terrible interruption. A pause had taken place in the dancing—the waltzing was going to begin; Miss Lavinia, without leaving the music-stool, was taking a glass of negus from a tray held by the demure green grocer who waited at parties in a solemn black coat and white cravat, when she dropped it with a crash. The door had opened and on the threshold stood Mr. Ford, his brown eyes wandering wrathfully over the scene of extravagance and dissipation, a sarcastic smile on his lips, whilst he uttered the ominous words which Miss Lavinia heard but too well:

"Ay, ay, the mice can play whilst the cat's away."

William and Edward looked dismayed. Even Robert was

not quite self-possessed ; but Mab, throwing down her bouquet of white roses, sprang to Mr. Ford with a joyful cry.

"Oh ! uncle, uncle !" she sobbed and laughed, throwing her arms around his neck. Ay, there was no fear, and there was true love and joy in that welcome. It did much towards softening Mr. Ford's anger. He kissed her with a smile, and his old hospitable feeling rising above his new stinginess, he uttered a hearty :

"I am glad to see you all, young people ; go on—go on, dance away. I shall sit and look—I am not tired. Go on with your music, Livy ; go to your partner, Mab."

"I cannot, uncle—let me sit by you."

"But let the others dance. Mrs. Shaw, I am glad to see you so young. Come, what was it, Livy ? A waltz, a polka, a quadrille ?"

Miss Lavinia, who would much rather play than talk to her brother, very willingly obeyed his request, and the waltzing began. Frederick was rather disconsolate at the loss of his partner, but Robert, as Mab could not help seeing, after exchanging a few words with his father, returned to Ellen—ay, and remained with her the whole evening. Mab bit her lip, her colour rose, and Mr. Ford saw there was something amiss.

"Are you not well, Mab ?" he asked.

"Indeed, uncle, I am very well," replied Mab, trying to smile.

But Mr. Ford saw the effort. He could imagine but one cause for her discomposure, and he kindly whispered :

"Never mind about the money, my little pet ; it is all yours, my darling."

Mab looked surprised, then she laughed as she understood his meaning, but the cloud did not leave her brow.

CHAPTER XV.

ON the next day Mr. Ford settled accounts with his household. The younger members of the family escaped indeed, but Miss Lavinia, Robert, and Mab were separately required to give explanations of their conduct, and very differently dealt with, for impartial justice was not one of Mr. Ford's attributes.

Poor Miss Lavinia came first, and received the brunt of her brother's displeasure.

"Well, Livy," he sarcastically said, "fine doings, I find, whilst I was away. Richmond Park—was the breakfast at the

Star and Garter?—a party at home. Livy, Livy, is it at your time of life you should be thinking of these frivolities? And the supper table! Why, there was food for a week on that table. How many joints, I wonder, were cut up in sandwiches? And the fowls and the tarts! Livy, Livy, I thought you had more discretion!”

Miss Ford was too generous to exculpate herself at Mab's expense, so she said nothing. Mr. Ford continued;

“This is my first journey, but it shall not be my last—once for all, Livy, I will have no such doings in my house.”

“Very well, John,” meekly replied Miss Lavinia; but Robert, who met her on the staircase, found her in tears.

“What is the matter, aunt?” he kindly asked.

“My dear boy, do not go near your father,” whispered Miss Lavinia, “that party has upset him.”

But Robert was not frightened; he wanted, moreover, to obtain such indirect information as his father's countenance and manner might convey, and he entered the back drawing-room in which Mr. Ford sat, casting up accounts. He looked up from his papers, and said sharply:

“Robert, I have been just telling your aunt that I will have no more such doings in my house. I mean to go away again, no matter when, nor for how long a time, but I will not find the place topsy turvy when I choose to return.”

“He means to go away again,” thought Robert; “then he has failed,” and Mr. Ford's ill-tempered manner confirmed him in the belief.

“You ought to have known better, if your aunt was such a fool,” crossly continued Mr. Ford; “what have people in our circumstances to do with parties and such fal-lals?”

“I am quite willing to bear the expense of this entertainment,” replied Robert.

“Is this your house, sir?” asked Mr. Ford, striking his fist on the table, and speaking with angry eyes. “Is this your house? No; well, then, talk of giving parties at your expense when you have a house of your own.”

Jealousy had driven Robert into his engagement with Mab, and temper now did her best to drive him into marriage.

“I do not mind how soon I have a house of my own,” he answered coolly; “Mab and I are engaged.”

Mr. Ford was thunderstruck. Every one else in the house had seen what was coming, he never had. The news fell upon him with the suddenness of an unforeseen calamity. He stared

at Robert, who calmly answered his look with another, that meant "I have said it, and I will stand by it."

"Engaged," vaguely said Mr. Ford; "engaged whilst I was away, Robert?"

Robert did not answer. Mr. Ford's features worked, and his lips trembled. He saw it all now. Robert wanted Mab, because he believed she would be rich some day; for no other reason. For it was not in Mr. Ford's nature to be fair even to his own son.

"That is how I am treated," he said, with much bitterness. "You do not merely engage yourself without my knowledge or consent, but you rob me of the only being in this house that really cares for me. Robert—Robert, you will have children of your own, and you will feel it yet! Was it so hard, then, to wait for my return? You have known her ten years, was it only when my back was turned that you could find out your own mind?"

Robert was spared the trouble of answering. Mab, in passing by the door, heard Mr. Ford's voice raised beyond its usual pitch. She guessed that her party was getting some one into trouble; and, willing to bear her share of the blame, aware, too, how light that share would be, she unceremoniously opened the door and entered, crying gaily,

"It was I did it all, uncle; indeed, it was."

"Was it?" said Mr. Ford, half smiling.

"Indeed it was; I had set my mind on having a party."

He drew her to his side, and looked half fondly, half sadly in her face.

"So you and Robert are engaged," he said.

Mab coloured and looked not unkindly at Robert. She had awakened in a mood by no means favourable to her lover. She was not jealous, at least she did not think herself so, but she felt slighted, and she was hurt. In the height of her displeasure she had resolved to inform him that though she did not wish to break their engagement, she thought it had best be reconsidered, as she was sure he must have committed some mistake about his own feelings; but by speaking so promptly to his father, Robert had given her a sure pledge of his sincerity; and as she was of a most placable disposition, and did not know how his avowal had been brought about, Mab, as we said, looked kindly on Robert and forgot her wrath.

"Yes," she said, turning round to Mr. Ford, with a happy

smile, "we are engaged, if you like it, uncle; for we set that condition on it—did we not, Robert?"

Robert assented, and Mr. Ford's displeasure lessened considerably.

"And, of course, you will consent," coaxingly continued Mab; "you would not break our hearts, would you, uncle?"

Mr. Ford pinched her cheek, and looked at her tenderly. Break her heart? Was she not the apple of his eye?

"No hearts need be broken through me," he said; "but you are both too young to marry, you especially, Mab. You must wait till you are of age at least."

"How can I know when I am of age?" asked Mab, with some emotion.

"We can guess it," answered Mr. Ford, reddening slightly, for he felt his son's eye upon him. "You understand, Robert," he added, sharply, "I do not wish you to marry Mab until she is of age."

"So I have heard you saying," coldly replied Robert.

"And I think it is high time for you to go to your office," crossly continued Mr. Ford.

Robert looked at his watch.

"I have five minutes yet," and he remained until the time was out; Mab followed him down stairs.

"Robert," she said, "what is there between your father and you?"

"You ask it—why, a child could see it. He hates me—he has always hated me, and it exasperates him that I should have you. And I will have you," continued Robert, his lip quivering with anger; "ay, and before you are of age either, Mab. Am I going to be dictated to as a boy? I will not submit to it."

Mab was thoroughly frightened. Robert, whose temper was roused—and he had not a good temper, though he controlled it well as a general rule—resumed, with the same cold anger.

"Mab, I have borne much because he is my father—there are things I cannot bear. No one must meddle with you—not even he—you understand."

"Robert, dear Robert," Mab said imploringly, "I am yours, indeed I am—then be but patient, for my sake."

Her entreating tone softened Robert considerably. It was his future wife who spoke, who looked up in his face with that tender, appealing glance. Robert's love for Mab, though sincere, was like that of most young men, all the better for a little opposition. Frederick's admiration had given Mab double value in

his eyes; his father's reluctant consent and threatened delay now made him feel impatient to possess her at once.

"I will be patient," he said, "but I will not wait four years to have you."

Something in his tone frightened Mab. She gave him a startled look, which Robert would not see. He took down his hat and walked out of the house, burning with far more anger than he had shown to Mab. The secret war between him and his father had now become an open contest. "He does not want me to have Mab," thought Robert, "and it can only be out of hatred to me. If she is to remain poor, she will scarcely get a better offer than mine; if she is to become rich, why should I not have her?"

That Mr. Ford might feel anxious for Mab's happiness and not care to trust him with it, Robert would not admit. He felt quite easy on that head. Of course Mab would be very happy with him. He was not over head and ears in love with her; but that sort of love was not one of the requisites of marriage, and he was quite fond enough of Mab, who was a very sweet and pretty girl, to make her an affectionate husband, even as he had no doubt that she would make him a true and loving wife. In short, Robert felt for Mab what ninety-nine men out of a hundred feel for their future wives; the strong ruling passion, which never calculates, and admits of no obstacles, being, fortunately for the peace and happiness of society, a rare occurrence.

But if Robert felt little trouble concerning the responsibility of Mab's happiness, he was too practical not to dislike the prospect of marrying on a hundred and fifty pounds a year. He could not and he would not do it. He must try Mr. James George again, and, before trying him, he would pay Captain George a morning visit. He had easily discovered his residence, and only delayed availing himself of the knowledge until his father's return. Mr. Ford had failed in his attempt: why not try his own diplomatic skill on Captain George? Forsaking, therefore, the road that led to the office, Robert now made his way to the Seven Dials.

Captain George, after giving up the pretty furnished villa in Brompton, had gone to Italy. There he and Mrs. George had shone for a time; they had soon returned to England, and, although Mrs. George's chest was delicate, they had left it no more. Some people die gracefully, like the Roman gladiator; from the splendour of thousands, they sink down to the genteel mediocrity of hundreds; but no such gradation had marked the fall

of Captain and Mrs. George. It resembled the catastrophe of great empires: it was sudden and overwhelming. So long as Captain George's credit lasted, and, strange to say, it long outlived his ready money, he kept his carriage, and Mrs. George her maid; but from the moment that Captain George stood once more a detected man in the London world of tradesmen, he was utterly ruined. When Captain and Mrs. George left their noble mansion, as it was styled in the bills, they sank into the utter abomination of rooms. A variety of these they had had. The New Road and the New Cut saw Captain George's swaggering hat, and were witness to his fierce encounters with street dealers in the way of bargaining; but from these he vanished in time, and entered the demesnes of the Seven Dials. There Robert now found him. He passed through an offensive court, groped up a narrow staircase, and, knocking for form's sake, entered a small but decidedly cheerful room, which was also scrupulously clean. It was a very small room, and, having a bed in it, was evidently the whole of Captain George's apartment.

Mrs. George was sitting by the window in an arm-chair, covered with crimson silk, a stray waif from the mansion, and which Captain George had conveyed away, spite the execution put in by the indignant upholsterer. She wore a plain brown silk, rather faded and stained, but which had been first-rate in its day. A clear white cap enshrined her motherly face, and as she sat thus, the pleasant morning sun shining upon her through the half-open window, outside of which blossomed a pot of mignonette and hung a bird's cage, she looked a picture of every domestic virtue. Mrs. George had grown deaf of late, and she neither looked nor turned round when Robert entered. Captain George remained likewise unobservant, but it was from a different motive. Captain George was engaged. He sat on a low stool in his waistcoat, but with his hat on, facing the fire, thus toasting a dainty rasher of bacon. The teapot stood on the hob, the kettle sang merrily, and on a plate within the fender lay two crisp rashers of bacon, there awaiting their third companion.

"Well, Giachino," said Captain George, without looking round, "what have you got this morning?"

"You take me for another person, Captain George," said Robert, shutting the door and coming forward as he spoke.

Now, here is one of the comforts of extreme poverty: it is fearless. Captain George was neither disconcerted nor alarmed at the sudden appearance of this stranger. He owed thousands,

and yet he was armour proof. He moved with the freedom of conscious rectitude and perfect innocence, though surrounded by incensed creditors. What could they do? He was poor, utterly poor, and to make Captain George live and die in a prison was useless revenge. With thorough coolness, he therefore scanned Robert from head to foot, and though he knew him at once, he greeted him with a—

"What the devil do you mean by coming in without knocking?" which was insolent, and was meant to be so.

Before Robert could answer, Captain George continued in the same aggressive tone, but now tinged with austere rebuke,

"I think, sir, you might take your hat off in the presence of Mrs. George. I keep mine on because I have a cold in my head, sir."

Robert had come prepared to bear much, and especially resolved not to lose his temper.

"I knocked," he said, "but you did not hear, I suppose. I am Mr. Ford's eldest son."

"And what's that to me?" replied Captain George.

"I have come to speak to you on business," continued Robert, glancing at Mrs. George, who was looking benevolently at him from her chair.

"Well, sir, Mrs. George is no hindrance I suppose. I have no secrets from Mrs. George, and moreover," added Captain George, growing facetious, and flourishing his toasting fork as he showed the room to Robert, "this apartment is my study, my bedroom, and Mrs. George's boudoir as well."

Robert hesitated, but he was pretty certain indeed that Mrs. George was, as her husband said, acquainted with all his private affairs, and, without losing time in feeling his ground, he said bluntly,

"I have called to ask you to give me some information concerning Miss Winter; I believe you can give it if you choose."

"If I choose!" ironically repeated Captain George, turning back to the fire; "go on, sir."

"There is no going on: do you choose or not to give me that information? Of course I am willing to pay for it."

"And how much will you give?" asked Captain George, looking back.

Robert hesitated.

"A thousand pounds on the day when she recovers her property."

Captain George shook his head.

"That will never do," he said, "never."

"How much do you expect?" asked Robert; "two thousand?"

"Half."

"And how much is that?"

"I say again half."

"Well, then, suppose we make it half; but one condition: it must be done within three months."

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Captain George, slowly wagging his hat from right to left, and looking round at Robert with a sneer, "to see how covetous youth is! Now, what can you want with all that money? Oh! the greediness of youth!"

"Will you do it, or will you not?" impatiently asked Robert.

Captain George, still wagging his hat from right to left, said slowly,

"Were you ever in your young days advised to catch a bird by laying salt on its tail; and having made the attempt, did you ever succeed in it? Because," he added, without waiting for Robert's reply, "that is just what you have been doing this morning. So you want to marry little 'Never mind,' and would rather have money with her than not, and having failed in getting any out of that screw, James, you come to the poor old Captain. A thousand pounds! Anything will do for the old Captain. Then make it two, then make it half—shan't be hurt—nothing be done to him, so he gets me the cash. Why, you young fool," he added, with a sudden change of tone, and derisively pointing the toasting fork at Robert like a gigantic and scornful forefinger, "if Captain George could get half, he could get the whole; and if he could get the whole, he would defy you to get a farthing of it out of him. Why, your father is just breaking his heart about this, and running and hunting on a wild goose chase, but he knows better than to attempt to bribe me. He throws me a five-pound note now and then, and I throw him a bone in the way of information that does me no harm, and it does him no good—but you, you simpleton, to come here and attempt to *do* me!"

Robert scorned to argue; he turned to the door, and, as it closed upon him, he had the pleasure of hearing Captain George say, as he resumed the toasting of his bacon, "Green, decidedly green!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE young man would not allow himself to be vexed. He acknowledged his defeat. Something like information might be got out of Captain George, but he could not be made to act against himself. He might be at drawn daggers with his brother's heir. Was it likely he would diminish a fortune which might yet revert to him. "Of course I went the wrong way to work," thought Robert. The conclusion did not do Robert justice, it was not so much that he had gone the wrong way to work, as that he was not suited to his work. His will was tortuous, his nature straightforward. He could and would not resist the temptation of trading in Mr. George's secret; but he lacked the subtlety required for his part. He lacked the patience too, and the check he had just received only strengthened his resolve to try Mr. George once more, and bring matters to an issue.

"Let him dismiss me if he dare," he thought as he approached the office.

Mr. James George had recently given up his airy and cheerful abode on the outskirts of London, and taken up his home within the dismal precincts where his business was transacted. Economy was supposed to be his motive, for Mr. George was of a saving turn. His new establishment was certainly conducted on strictly economical principles. Mrs. Smith superintended; under her acted a plain cook, who was also housemaid, and the porters and messengers required for the business proved convenient substitutes for either footman or page. The pretty girl, with whom Robert had once taken tea, was never seen in the dull city house. From some words which Mr. James George dropped, Robert understood that she was in a fashionable boarding-school on the outskirts of London.

She was certainly better there than at the house, which, after being merely Mr. George's office, had now become his permanent residence. It was not situated in those parts of the ancient City of London where shop-fronts and walls of plate-glass reveal the profuse wealth within. It stood far out of the way of that great stream of activity and life which flows around the island of St. Paul's. The neighbourhood was almost a quiet one, and the street in which Mr. George's office was to be found, had of the City attributes none save its dirt and smoke. It possessed these in perfection. A sombre mist brooded over it in

fine weather; on dull days it became fog—yellow and lurid. Soot clung to the fronts of the gloomy brick houses, and the brass plates on the doors were the only bright spot about them. Few of the windows had curtains, for these houses were mostly used as offices and stores, and needed no foolish muslin. About the middle of the street, on the left-hand side, stood a church, black and ancient, and around it a garden of graves; both enclosed by black iron railings. This church faced Mr. George's abode, and both church and graveyard were visible from the official windows on the first-floor.

Mr. James George had rarely been late when he lived five miles away from the office—now he was never late; and, being a just man, he expected his clerks to be as punctual as himself. When Robert, therefore, appeared a full hour behind his time, he found his employer setting his watch by the church dial.

"How do you do, Ford?" he kindly asked. "I was afraid you were unwell."

"I am late," said Robert, "but I am very well, thank you, sir."

"I am glad to hear it; and now, Ford, let me give you a piece of information, you may find it useful. What do you suppose is the result of living opposite a church?"

"Really, sir," replied Robert, sitting down to his desk, "the question is too comprehensive for me to answer it."

"Well, you are right. Living opposite a church has many consequences; one amongst the rest is, that one's watch is sure to be always wrong. Now, what do you suppose is the real time?"

"I am afraid to say, sir; for I know I am an hour late."

"Are you, indeed!"

"We sat up late last night," continued Robert, "my father came home from a long journey, and, moreover, thinking I had time to spare—I cannot imagine how I committed the mistake—I called on Captain George before coming here."

"Oh! ah! indeed! And how is Captain George?"

"Very well in health, I believe; but not in as good a temper as persons anxious to transact business with him might wish him to be."

Mr. James George said nothing: he was still setting his watch, but Robert, who was looking at him boldly, saw that his hand shook a little.

He resumed.

"A very odd matter sent me there. Captain George pos-

sesses, it seems, some valuable information, which I hoped to make available; but Captain George was not willing. I must find some one else."

Robert bit the end of his pen as he spoke, and again looked at Mr. George.

"Valuable information!" said that gentleman. "Of what kind?"

This question Robert was not inclined to answer; but he said coolly,

"My position in life is not a brilliant one; it is natural I should seek to improve it."

"Natural!" cried Mr. George, struck with the soundness of this doctrine; "I say it is an admirable endeavour, Ford—an admirable endeavour!"

Robert smiled, and bowed. No more was said. The young man bent over his desk, and set about his daily tasks. Mr. George retired to his private room, and remained there until luncheon time; as one o'clock struck, Robert heard him leave the house, and, looking out cautiously, he saw him turn round the corner of the old black church, and vanish in its shadow.

Mr. George never went out during business hours, which for him extended from ten till four. What took him out now? Robert could not doubt he was the cause, and he would reap the reward, or pay the penalty of Mr. George's infraction to his daily habits. For a moment the thought that he might lose his situation—for to speak of having called upon Captain George was tantamount to resuming the forbidden subject of Mab—startled Robert. He had never known anxiety. From his thirteenth year to the present day he had earned his bread with moderate labour and thorough security. But now he had risked that peace of mind, that certainty, which are invaluable and rare. He almost wished he had held his tongue, and not spoken of Captain George; but second thoughts made him scorn this timorous mood, and rely on a better issue.

The day passed in alternatives of doubt and hope. Robert's labour was over, and he was rising to depart, when he heard Mr. George's voice inquiring below if Mr. Ford was gone, and the servant's answer—"Mr. Ford was still up-stairs."

"Now for it," thought Robert. Mr. George's heavy step creaked up the staircase, and in another minute Mr. George entered the room. He was cheerful and smiling—a bad sign.

"Not gone yet, Ford," he said gaily.

"I was going, sir."

"Just so—just so," cheerfully continued Mr. George; "I have been thinking over that matter, Ford."

"That matter," and even simply "this," were favourites with Mr. George. He used them to express a great deal, and Robert seldom troubled him for an explanation; but now being in a mood to humour Mr. George, he coolly asked:

"What matter, sir?"

"Oh! ah, to be sure. And so you are not satisfied with three hundred pounds a year?"

"With what, sir?"

"I committed a mistake—with a hundred and fifty pounds a year."

The heart of Robert began to beat, but it was not with fear.

"No, sir," he replied, dropping his sharp tone, "I am not."

"Just so—you want three hundred. I see—in short, Ford, you want to marry Miss Winter."

"I do, sir."

"And you also want something for your brothers—promising youths, I believe. Well, now, Ford, this is what I shall do for you. I will procure each of your brothers a situation with a hundred pounds salary; I will, as a testimonial of my satisfaction, give Miss Winter five hundred pounds on her wedding day, and I will double your salary—make it three hundred, in short."

Robert was standing at his desk. He neither moved, nor looked, nor smiled. Cool as ice, he listened to Mr. George.

"I will do this, and no more," resumed Mr. George, in a cold, hard tone.

"May I ask what you expect from me in return?" inquired Robert.

"Nothing as yet, Ford, nothing as yet—a little extra work and responsibility in this office, of course, but nothing to speak of."

Robert drew on his gloves, and quietly said:

"I am much obliged to you. I shall think over it."

"Why, no—that will not do," said Mr. George; "no, Ford, I cannot allow you to think it over."

"Then I must ask again to know what you expect from me in return?"

"Why, nothing, absolutely nothing," said Mr. George, looking very much surprised; "I am giving you a token of my satisfaction—no more. And allow me to wonder at the extraordinary way in which you receive such a token of your employer's approbation."

This reproach, albeit urged in a feeling tone, produced very little effect upon Robert. But though he had not much faith in Mr. George's word, he chose for once to believe him, or to seem to do so.

"I am happy to think I have deserved your approbation, sir," he said, quietly; "and much obliged to you for the substantial method you have taken to express it. Of course," he added, laying some stress on the words, "I accept."

"Very well, very well, Ford," exclaimed Mr. George, looking extremely cheerful; "allow me to congratulate you, Ford, on your prospects—shake hands, Ford—three hundred a year! Very handsome—*very* handsome, Ford!"

Robert was too much accustomed to Mr. George's ways to be surprised at hearing himself congratulated by that gentleman on a piece of good fortune which came through him.

"And my brothers, sir?" he said, when Mr. George had shaken his hand enough; "where are they to be?"

"One at Sampson's, the other at Richard's & Co."

"Good houses both," said Robert, with sparkling eyes; "but is it certain?"

"You will not put that question next week," playfully said Mr. George.

Robert's eyes beamed; he felt treading upon air. His own three hundred a year, Mab herself, were not as sweet as this good fortune which opened so fair before his brothers.

"And when do you mean to get married?" playfully asked Mr. George.

Robert reddened.

"Soon, sir," he said; "my narrow income alone delayed my doing so."

"Mind I shall give away the bride," paternally said Mr. George.

Robert was staggered. The proposal was the very sublime of audacity. He, Mr. James George, give away Mab! Robert blushed with anger and shame, and his better nature so far prevailed that he plainly replied:

"That is, unfortunately, impossible. Miss Winter must decline the honour."

"What, already bespoken!—well, well—I shall be godfather at least."

The temper of his father, blunt and violent by fits, rose within Robert at this pertinacious insolence. He turned on Mr. George, and gave that gentleman a look so significant and so

stern, that Mr. George, dropping all facetiousness, said with decided sharpness :

"I beg you will not be late to-morrow."

"I shall not," was Robert's short answer ; and taking down his hat, he walked downstairs without bidding Mr. George good evening. "The audacious villain !" he muttered as he walked along the pavement. "Give Mab away !"

But where was the use of anger ? Why resent Mr. George's cold villany any more than Captain George's broad insolence ? Robert's wrath cooled as he walked along the streets, still hot with the sultriness of the day, and now fast thinning of their eager and wearied crowds. It was a beautiful and still evening. An evening that made Robert think of Richmond, and villas by the Thames, and gardens, where Mab would train the drooping roses and feed the white swans, and he stand and look on. He felt very happy. Could he have hoped, in the morning, to attain his end so easily ? His conscience, indeed, gave him a few pricks—the means he had taken were not exactly straight, not such means as a man cares to avow in the open day ; but did not that severe censor confess that his end was unselfish and true ? If he used Mab, did he not use her to the best advantage for herself as well as for his own sake ?

Would his father's wild researches and unequal struggle against a powerful and unscrupulous enemy ever bring in what Robert had obtained with so little effort ? Dear Mab, he certainly loved her very much just then ! And William and Edward ! his heart swelled with joy as he thought of their two beaming faces. A hundred a year each, and that was not all ; would not he push them on and make men of them yet !

All this was delightful, but there was a thought that would come to Robert again and again, taking the form of a question. What would Mr. George ask of him in return for three hundred a year, two good situations, and five hundred pounds on Mab's wedding day ? And the same monitor that questioned replied : Mr. George will exact some renunciation, how worded does not matter, but surely effective and complete, of Mab's rights, past and future. Something that will undo all Mr. Ford's efforts, and set the seal on her destiny. Robert was staggered. Could it be that his father was near success, and that, Esau-like, he (Robert) was selling his all for a mess of porridge ? Were Mr. George's concessions the result of well-grounded apprehensions, or of his own fearful nature ? To the latter conclusion Robert inclined. His father had been failing all these years, what should make him

succeed now? Besides, could Mr. George bind him so fast that he should never be free again? Might not the bargain do for Mr. George's life-time, and end with his death? But Robert stopped as he came to this conclusion. He was young, only twenty-three, and he did not like the turn his thoughts were taking: they were not frank, they were not honest; they were the thoughts of a deceiver. Robert might be ready for temptation, but he was not so ripe as to forestall it. In his own belief, at least, he was still true.

It was a relief, however, to enter Queen Square and dismiss these unpleasant cogitations. The little enclosure looked green and fresh, and, as he passed it by, Robert recognized Mab's muslin dress. She saw him and let him in. Robert took her arm, and, pressing it to his side, said tenderly:

"Mab, we shall soon be in our villa by the Thames: my salary is doubled—I earn three hundred a year."

Mab was amazed and dazzled at an income so splendid.

"How happy uncle and aunt will be!" she cried.

"We cannot tell them yet, Mab. It is a business secret."

But though the five hundred pounds were a secret too, Robert could not help telling Mab. She was lost in astonishment and admiration. Her eyes sparkled with glad enthusiasm. What a business paragon Robert must be, she thought! and as she thought she spoke. Never had Robert liked Mr. George less than when he listened to Mab's unmerited praise. He hastened to interrupt her with the declaration that he had still better news in store.

"What better than what you have just told me, Robert?"

"Yes, guess."

"Mr. George is giving you a villa on the Thames, and puts you down for a thousand a year in his will."

"Don't be childish, Mab; he has procured William and Edward situations of a hundred a year each."

"And is that your rare news?"

"It is."

He looked jealous, and ready to be vexed, if Mab were not pleased enough; but though she wondered if Robert really loved her half as much as he loved his brothers, she called up her brightest smiles to please him. He saw the effort, and exclaimed:

"Mab, something has happened; what is it?"

"What should have happened?" asked Mab, with unusual equivocation.

"There they are!" he cried, seeing his brothers knock at the

door of the house; and, in his eagerness to follow them, and give them the happy tidings, he forgot his question.

Yet Robert was not mistaken. Something had happened; something which Mab would never tell him, and which she would remember yet with mingled grief and shame in many an hour of keen sorrow.

Frederick Norton had proposed to Mab that morning, and been rejected. He had uttered no reproaches; but he had given her a look of such sad surprise, that, with the deepest humiliation, Mab had felt how great her guilt had been. The time may come when she will feel it better still.

CHAPTER XVII.

"WHAT will you give me for my news?" asked Robert, overtaking his brothers, and entering the house with them.

Robert was rarely jocose. On hearing him speak so gaily, Edward knew that something of importance had happened. He turned round, and looked eagerly in his elder brother's face. Robert smiled, and William looked at Mab, who, rising on tip-toe, whispered something in his ear. William's face grew bright as day, and holding out his hand, he exclaimed:

"Oh! Robert!"

"But what are you shaking hands for?" asked Edward.

"We have situations of a hundred a year each," replied William. "There never was a brother like Robert."

"I think there never were brothers like mine," proudly said Robert.

They all entered the front parlour, and repeated the news for the benefit of Mr. Ford and Miss Lavinia. Miss Lavinia received the tidings with a hysterical joy, in which admiration for Robert's superhuman goodness decidedly exceeded her satisfaction at the good fortune of William and Edward. Then the glorious prospects were discussed. Sampson's was a first-rate house—first-rate!—and Richards and Co. was excellent. Great changes were effected in five minutes; Mab and Aunt Lavinia each received the promise of a silk dress, the parlours were re-carpeted and re-furnished; holidays by the sea-side, with something very like yachting, were planned. Never had two hundred a year gone so far as these two hundred pounds.

"Well, uncle," said Mab, going up to Mr. Ford, who had not spoken one word, "is it not good news?"

"There never was any one like Robert," murmured Miss Lavinia, "never."

Mr. Ford did not answer: he was very pale. Mab felt his arm tremble beneath her hand; it was plain he had received a shock—but why so?

"And how did Robert get these situations?" he asked at length.

"Why, through that good old Mr. George, of course," replied Mab; "I used to dislike him—I did not know why. I shall love him now."

Mr. Ford breathed hard, and set his teeth, but he controlled himself.

"Very good news, as you say," he observed, with a vacant look; "is dinner ready, Lavinia?"

Even Mab was hurt and disappointed at his coldness; even she thought it unnatural that the good fortune of his sons should leave him so careless and indifferent; even she began to understand that they could not love him.

Alas! she did not know how keen a pang the news had inflicted—what bitter memories they had awakened! Had he too not come home once overflowing at the good fortune of having disposed of Robert for sixty pounds a year—and had he not soon learned at how dear a cost that good fortune was bought? What could he think now, save that some new iniquity was in store—some wrong-doing, in which his innocent children were to become abettors, dragged into the mire, as Robert had been dragged by him ten years ago.

The thought was too bitter. As soon as dinner was over Mr. Ford rose, left the house, and walked off to Mr. George's office in the City.

Mr. George was busy writing in his private room, when he was told that Mr. Ford wanted to speak to him.

"Not Mr. Robert Ford, sir, but Mr. Ford's father."

"Mr. Ford's father?" and Mr. George threw himself back in his chair, turned up his eyes, and seemed to try and remember who Mr. Ford's father could be.

"Show him up," he said, at length. "I cannot say I recollect, but show him up, Barker."

Barker did as he was bid; and Mr. Ford's step was heard on the staircase, and Mr. Ford himself entered the room.

"I declare, Mr. Ford, I did not know who it was; Barker said 'Mr. Ford,' and I kept thinking of your son Robert—pray take a chair."

Mr. Ford remained standing, and Mr. Ford looked very stern.

"Sir," he said, "I understand you have been procuring my two younger sons situations."

"I am happy to say I have," replied Mr. George, virtuously.

"Pray, sir, may I ask what was your motive in doing so?"

Mr. George looked surprised. The question certainly was a strange one.

"Motive!" he repeated, looking round the room, as if in search of a stray motive. "I protest, Mr. Ford, you surprise me—what motive could I have, save that of rendering two deserving young men an essential service."

Mr. Ford set his teeth, and his brown eyes flashed angrily.

"Look you, sir," he said, in a low but angry voice, "I will have no meddling with these two boys. With the elder one I cannot interfere—he is beyond my power—you know why—but with these two innocent lads *you* shall not meddle. They, at least, do not know their father's sin, and need not suffer for his guilt."

"Mr. Ford, what have I to do with your family affairs?" asked Mr. George, a little impatiently; "all I know is, that your eldest son is a most deserving young man."

"Who said he was not?" defiantly interrupted Mr. Ford; "I tell you there is not one in a hundred like Robert Ford—I tell you I dare you to find a flaw in him—and I tell you that, though you are doing your best to corrupt him, as you corrupted his father, Robert Ford will come triumphant out of it all. Ay, do your best, or your worst," added Mr. Ford, with flashing eyes, "my boy's honour is beyond your reach."

Mr. George straightened his hands, and looked at the backs of them very attentively. His eyes were downcast, and there was a stealthy smile on his lips. Mr. Ford felt exasperated—he took two steps forward.

"Do you mean to say you have bought him?" he asked, sternly; "I tell you you cannot—you cannot!"

"Mr. Ford, you are losing your temper," said Mr. George, with calm rebuke; "may I ask what you came here for?"

Mr. Ford cooled at once.

"I came here," he replied, "to tell you this, that all you do against me is useless. You may get situations for my younger sons, you may raise Robert's salary fifty pounds—I give up nothing. Nothing in this world shall conquer me—I will struggle to the death against you—and something tells me that I

shall prevail—that you shall not live to enjoy much longer the fruit of your iniquity.”

“Mr. Ford,” said Mr. George, feelingly, “what have I to do with your family affairs, and, I am sorry to add, dissensions? I have done my best to serve your sons, and I do not regret it. The eldest is, as I said, a most deserving young man; I have no doubt his brothers are like him—I hope to help them to good situations; I have doubled his salary, not raised it fifty pounds, and, Mr. Ford, even though ingratitude should be my reward, I do not regret it.”

Mr. Ford looked stunned.

“You have doubled Robert’s salary!” he said.

“I have done so,” complacently replied Mr. George.

“And what is it for?” asked the wretched father, his white lips trembling.

“Mr. Ford, you are most mysterious. What motive should I, an employer, have for doubling the salary of your son, my clerk? Of course he will have to work harder, he will also incur a certain responsibility; but you must excuse me, Mr. Ford, I know very, *very* little of *you*, though we are cousins. I cannot, I will not enter into any further explanations; I consider that my character is a sufficient one.”

Mr. Ford seemed unable to reply. His nature was not one of habitual mistrust. He had not thought there was anything beyond the two situations of William and Edward; he had not suspected that so open a bargain had been struck between Mr. George and his son Robert, of whom he was so proud in his heart. The blow crushed him. He was not angry with Robert, that was not his feeling. No, the memory of his own iniquity, of Alicia’s death-bed, of her wild lament over her innocent children, the sense of a curse which followed in his steps, and was even now being fulfilled in those dear to him, these were the things he could not bear. He rallied, however, so far as to look Mr. George firmly in the face, and to say in a clear, even voice:

“I suppose you triumph in your heart because the same arts which seduced the father have now in some measure prevailed over the son. But I tell you there is a difference, and that this time all you do shall not avail you. Never, with my consent, shall she forfeit one of her rights—never—and her at least you cannot reach—she will not sign a scrap of paper if I forbid it, and forbid it I do.”

“Mr. Ford, must I request once more that you will be so

kind as not to involve *me* in *your* family dissensions? I think it deplorable that you cannot rule your children, and should come to me with such extraordinary revelations—and again I say, what have *I* to do with it all?”

“God’s justice is hanging over you,” said Mr. Ford, looking hard at him.

“Profane!” murmured Mr. George, half closing his eyes.

“It is hanging over you, I say, and it will reach you before long. I tell you again that I stand between her and all harm. You cannot reach her unless through me, Mr. George; and do not attempt to touch her,” he added, drawing so near to Mr. George that this gentleman thought proper to open his eyes rather quickly, “or if you do so, why, let it be at your peril. With regard to my sons,” continued Mr. Ford in a cooler tone, “I repeat what I have said, you may do what you please with the elder one; his integrity and judgment both place him beyond your reach; but with the younger ones, meddle if you dare, that’s all. They shall beg their bread before they accept benefits from you.”

So saying, Mr. Ford turned his back on Mr. George, and walked downstairs.

Mr. Ford had put on a brave front whilst he stood in the presence of his enemy, but when he crossed the dark street and reached the shelter of the old church, he stood still, and, leaning against the iron railings, he gave way to the anguish of his heart. Robert, his secret pride and darling, had fallen. William and Edward were safe; Mr. George would never dare to proceed in that matter, but Robert had yielded to the tempter.

“The father sold her for five hundred pounds, and the son for three hundred a year!”

Such was the weary burden of his vexed spirit. At length Mr. Ford rallied and walked on. He sought, and he found, excuses for Robert. After all, the poor boy only drove the best bargain he could; and if he derived benefit from it, he meant Mab to share it. Of course he did not know he was undoing all Mr. Ford had been striving to gain for years. Suppose he were to take him into his confidence, and they should both league against Mr. George! But, no, that could not be. Robert meant well of course; but he must know what he was about, or he would not have concealed the fact that his salary was doubled. Alone Mr. Ford had acted these ten years, and alone he must act to the last. Thus Mr. Ford reasoned, and he did not acknowledge to himself that the real motive of his silence was

shame. Robert, indeed, knew the full depth and extent of his past transgressions, but there are things which are too hard to be put into words, and the story of how Mab came to Queen Square was such a one for Mr. Ford. He could not tell it again, he could not talk of what it was, at times, too bitter to remember.

On reaching home, Mr. Ford went up to his bed-room, and in it he breakfasted the next morning. Some time after his sons had left the house, he sent for Mab.

"Mab," he said to her, abruptly, "I have been thinking over that engagement—you must never marry Robert."

"What!" cried Mab, amazed.

"I say you must not marry him. You do not love him—he does not love you. It is all a mistake."

"But, uncle, how could we be mistaken?"

"Poor little innocent!" said Mr. Ford, laying his hand on her shoulder and looking compassionately in her face. "I tell you he does not love you. Do you think I do not know when a man, and a man of twenty-three, too, loves a girl; let me tell you, Mab, it is not in that cold-blooded fashion."

But Mab was incredulous.

"Robert is very fond of me," she said, a little indignantly.

"But he is not going to rave about a girl he has known all his life—of course not."

"Poor little innocent!" said Mr. Ford, again.

"But, uncle," said Mab, with tears in her eyes, "why should Robert wish to marry me if he does not like me?"

"Ah! why?"

Mr. Ford knew why, but he could not tell Mab. He could not betray his own son and with him his own weary secret.

"I repeat it," he resumed, "Robert does not love you, and you do not love him, and you shall not have my consent to marry until you are of age. I will protect you, Mab, against your own will."

"I am in no hurry to marry, indeed I am not," said Mab, reddening; "I am very young, and so is Robert, but indeed, uncle, we love each other truly."

"I know what love is," replied Mr. Ford, in a low tone, and with downcast eyes, and a strange sad smile on his lips, "and it is no use telling me Robert loves you, and that you love Robert. I know better."

Mab was staggered, but not convinced.

"And you must promise not to marry Robert without my

knowledge and permission," continued Mr. Ford; "and what is more, you must promise, solemnly promise—not to sign a scrap of paper without first consulting me."

Mab was much perplexed and astonished, but she gave the required promise. She knew before evening why Mr. Ford had exacted it: he went out, and a few hours after doing so came a letter enclosing money. He had gone away again, but whither or for how long a time, Mr. Ford did not say.

"He is in London," said Miss Lavinia. "He was in London before watching me—I looked at his carpet bag, and could not discover one steamboat or railway ticket upon it; besides, you know, he had not time to go to America and come back. I am convinced, Mab, your uncle was in London the whole time."

Mab tried to laugh, but how could she, with Mr. Ford's warnings haunting her?

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE dinner was a merry one, spite Mr. Ford's absence. William and Edward had rushed into the house with an eager, "What news?" To which Robert had answered with a "You pair of simpletons, do you suppose I brought home the situations to put them down your throats?"

This damped their ardor, but only for a while. William declared he had not made up his mind to accept; and Edward said he should think about it. Miss Lavinia looked bewildered, and remonstrated.

"My dear aunt," replied William, "we are amiable, but we are prudent. We will not make up our minds in a hurry."

Miss Lavinia sighed, and gently remarked, "that it was not wise to jest about the blessings of Providence."

"Very true," was Edward's answer; "but in this case, aunt, it is we who happen to be the blessings."

Mab was struck with Robert's face; she knew how to read it, and though he laughed, it was plain this jesting jarred with his mood.

"Something has happened," thought Mab. Something had happened, indeed, and when dinner was over, Robert managed to send both his brothers out, and to remain alone with Miss Ford, after Mab had gone up to her room. Having carefully closed the parlour door, he said gravely:

"Aunt, I have an important matter to discuss with Mab and

you. I am more concerned than I can tell you, to find that my father has left us once more.—I want to marry Mab.”

“But you are already engaged to her, my dear Robert.”

“Aunt, I want to marry her at once.”

Miss Lavinia could not speak.

“Of course you are amazed. This is the case. Mr. George, besides giving my brothers two excellent situations, doubles my salary, and agrees to give Mab five hundred pounds on her wedding day.”

Miss Ford’s joy, though mute at first, soon became eloquent. Robert heard her out patiently, then said in his calm way :

“These are great advantages, but they are subject to one condition—I must marry Mab within a week.”

Miss Lavinia’s breath was gone again.

“It happened thus,” pursued Robert ; “after I had accepted, and gratefully enough, Mr. George’s kind offers, he asked me when I meant to marry. I replied in a few months. ‘In a few months,’ he repeated quite sharply ; ‘and do you suppose, Mr. Ford, I am going to give a responsible situation of three hundred a year to an unmarried man ? Why, sir, I concluded your banns were published ! I insist on an immediate union.’ The word insist made me lose my temper. I answered I know not what. The upshot of the whole was that Mr. George said, ‘Sir, if you are not married within ten days, you may look for three hundred a year elsewhere.’ I need not tell you what this means, aunt ; if I lose my situation and five hundred pounds, William and Edward also lose their hundred a year each. In short, it is our three-fold ruin ! As you love me, help me to prevail over the opposition I expect from Mab.”

Miss Ford did not answer. She looked at him, then at the door, and Robert, turning round, saw Mab standing on the threshold of the room—the very image of dismay. He was not sorry that she had heard him, and that he had not to repeat the garbled narrative of what had passed between him and Mr. George.

Mab came forward, sat down, looked at her aunt, then at Robert.

“Robert !” she exclaimed, clasping her hands, and speaking impressively, “this is some dreadful mistake.”

“I think so, too,” said Miss Lavinia, rallying ; “it is impossible.”

“It is but too true,” mournfully replied Robert.

“Robert,” persisted Mab, “I cannot understand it at all. It really is no business of Mr. George’s when we do marry, or

even if we ever marry. I must not have understood you, or you must not have understood him. Tell me all that passed between you and him, and perhaps I shall be able to see through it all."

Mab could not have preferred a more inconvenient request, nor one with which Robert felt less inclined to comply. Indeed, it was impossible he should do so. Mr. George had not been very open—he never was so; but Mr. George and his clerk had understood each other thoroughly that morning. Mr. George had not gone so far as to tell him of Mr. Ford's visit; but he had said, in his paternal way—"Ford, I have been thinking it over. You must marry soon—very soon. I should be sorry to wound the feelings of a son, but in my opinion, Ford, both you and the amiable young person who is to become your bride, cannot withdraw too soon from the influence at Queen Square. It is dangerous to your best interests. Indeed, so strongly do I feel upon this subject, that I shall actually think myself justified in suspending the effect of my promises until you are married, or on the point of marriage. Let it be in a week, Ford, in a week."

Robert neither could nor did misunderstand this. Mr. George wanted to take Mab away from Mr. Ford's influence; and if he wanted that, it was proof that he intended exacting something very substantial indeed, in exchange for his promised benefits. Robert thought the opportunity a good one to raise his terms—for much would fain have more; but Mr. George's case was probably a stronger one than the young man had thought; for on the first hint he turned upon him with something like a snarl, and bade him make haste and be a married man, or give up all hopes of his employer's favour. These were not particulars which Robert could unfold to Mab and Miss Ford, and he therefore said, rather crossly:

"Really, Mab, you have a poor opinion of my judgment. There was no misunderstanding whatever, and the only question is, how soon can we get married?"

"Robert, it is impossible."

"Mab, you will think over it."

Mab shook her head.

"It is impossible."

"My dear," said Miss Ford, hesitatingly, "there is a great deal at stake."

"It is impossible," said Mab again; "before he left, uncle made me promise, solemnly promise, not to marry Robert without his consent. It would almost seem as if he foresaw this, and meant to prevent it."

"Of course he did," cried Robert, setting his teeth, and walking angrily about the room, as he saw all that Mr. George had not told him; "of course he did—he hates me—he hates his children—he has done it to ruin us."

"Oh! Robert, how can you talk so? He loves you very dearly, but it is nevertheless true that he does not wish me to become your wife just yet."

"And what will you do, Mab?"

"Robert, how can you ask?—I must obey him of course."

"And so you will ruin those two poor boys, you will ruin me, to keep a most unjust promise. Oh! Mab, I did not think that of you."

"Robert, I cannot help it—what am I to do?"

"Mab, are you not pledged to me? Are you not to be my wife? Am I nothing? Is a pledge exacted from your tenderness to stand between the whole of our future happiness?"

"Not the whole!" she pleaded.

"Mab, you are no child! You know the value of money. I cannot marry without it, and I might wait years and not get such a situation. And the boys! You heard them at dinner. Have you the heart to do it?"

"Let me go to Mr. George's, Robert——"

"And get me dismissed on the spot. Thanks. You will drive me distracted!" he added.

Spite her sincere grief at displeasing him, Mab felt it was the three hundred pounds a year, and the five hundred pounds on the wedding day, and the situations of William and Edward, that distracted Robert; but his anger hurt her to the heart, and she remained silent.

"Mab," he said, in a much softer tone, "what do you decide?"

"My dear Robert," here put in Miss Lavinia, who had all this time been enduring the keenest struggles of conscience, "it is impossible—Mab has promised never to marry you without her uncle's consent, and she must not do it."

Robert darted a look full of reproach at Miss Ford, and with a cutting, "I did not expect that from *you*, aunt," he angrily walked out of the room, and taking down his hat, left the house.

His anger cooled in the square; it cooled still more as he walked along the streets and thought the matter over. Mab would not yield, that was plain; well, then, Mr. George must, that was all. And here the generous instincts and the sanguine spirit of youth came to his aid. It was humiliating, and Robert

felt it, to abet Mab's wronger in any way, and Robert being unable to do it, virtuously resolved that he would not; nay, more, he resolved since the battle had begun, it should end in Mr. George's defeat. In the meanwhile, there could be no harm in doing now what he had intended from the first, that is to say, in testing Mr. George's sincerity.

It was characteristic of Robert that he had no friends—but he had acquaintances. Amongst these was a Mr. Josiah Webster, a nervous, timid gentleman, who spent his days in an office in the city, and his evenings at home in his city chambers—in other words, in the second floor back bedroom of a house in a city square. The friends who came and passed an evening with him, sometimes committed a slip of the tongue and bluntly called it a room; but Mr. Webster clung to the dignified plural, and, though too courteous to correct his guests in plain speech, he brought in his “chambers” in the next sentence; his obstinacy prevailed in time, and “Webster's chambers” became a fact.

There are some beings whom their complete innocence saves from harm. They are the Unas of this world, and its roaring lions lie down at their feet, and lick them tenderly. Of these was Mr. Webster. It was impossible to hurt him. No one thought of doing it; his mild temper, his guileless heart, gave him the most precious of all impunities, that which is yielded voluntarily. Every one was kind and gentle to him, every one spared him, no one but would have been ashamed to have a rough word for “Little Josiah.” But innocent though he was, Mr. Webster was known to possess a valuable amount of city information, which, being used most discreetly, often made him a useful person. All that could be known in the city Mr. Webster knew; perhaps because the city was his darling, and that no eyes are so keen and sure as the eyes of love.

“Little Josiah will know,” thought Robert, and to the chambers he made his way. It was part of the agreement between the tenant of the chambers and the lady who held them at first-hand, that her hand-maiden, Mary Ann, was to open the street door; but there the bargain ended, and the visitors were left to grope their way up-stairs and to enter the chambers without being properly announced. This Mr. Webster, who had a terror of thieves, considered highly dangerous. He had argued with Mrs. Lerrick and with Mary Ann, but both were so far blind to their own safety as to decline taking his view of the subject. Mr. Webster accordingly procured a patent Chubb's lock for his absence, and another patent, a steel chain, to be used

when he was within. When Robert, therefore, after groping his way up, reached his door, and, giving it a preliminary knock, attempted to open it, he heard something rattle inside, and was asked in Mr. Webster's stern tones, "who he was, and what he wanted." Robert named himself, and was admitted at once.

Mr. Webster's chambers were pleasant, though small. They abounded in the little selfish comforts dear to bachelors and old maids. Their neatness was admirable, yet they were very full. All sorts of shelves, brackets, and stands, held all sorts of treasure, chiefly scientific; for it was Mr. Webster's delight to accumulate a vast quantity of the most useless knowledge. He was a living cyclopedia, whom no one ever cared to open, even for a moment. And Mr. Webster was neither surprised nor annoyed at this neglect. He was an intellectual miser, who acquired knowledge for the pure pleasure of hoarding it. This Robert knew without caring, in the least, about it; he was surprised, nevertheless, to find that, whilst it was still broad daylight in the streets, Mr. Webster's blinds and curtains were closely drawn, and that his lamp was lit.

"Yes," said Mr. Webster, noticing his look, "I like lamp-light, I find it favourable to concentration of thought."

"I suppose so," said Robert, taking a chair. "Where have you been all this time?"

"No where, thank Heaven! I am never so happy as in my chambers."

Robert gravely agreed that the chambers of his friend were such as to yield a large amount of happiness; and little by little, step by step, he led the discourse to Sampson's, and said in his most careless tone,

"So they want a new clerk?"

Now, with all Mr. Webster's simplicity of character, there mingled a certain amount of shrewdness. When he heard the name of Sampson, he knew why the young man had come; only he mistook his object in seeking for information.

"They did want a new clerk," he said, "but they were suited this morning."

"Thank you, Mr. George," indignantly thought Robert. "And Richards," he said, aloud.

"Richards! Oh! they want no one. They keep to the old set."

This was too much. The wretched old deceiver had attempted to cheat him in the most barefaced manner. Mr. Webster, who

still mistook Robert's object, and who watched with concern his disturbed countenance, said soothingly,

"You may be sure that, should I hear of anything likely to suit you, I shall let you know in time."

Robert stared at him; then the truth suddenly flashed across his mind: Mr. George was going to give up business, and he had promised readily because promises cost him nothing.

Robert rose to his feet, burning with indignation and shame. True, he had meant to ask for and to exact security, but would not Mr. George have deceived him in that too? Of course he would.

Oh! what a dupe!—what a miserable dupe he had nearly been.

"Does Mr. George make no provision for his employés on leaving business?" asked Mr. Webster.

"Excellent provision!" replied Robert, laughing bitterly; "he wanted to provide me with a wife! And it is eight now, is it not?—just eight—then I must go, and settle the matter with him. Good night."

He walked out abruptly, leaving Mr. Webster much surprised at Mr. James George's match-making tendency.

"I'm a ruined man," thought Robert, when he found himself alone in the street. "Mr. George would never have attempted to deceive me so shamelessly, if he were not proof against me. He would have made me marry Mab, sign away her rights, and then laughed at me."

It was very hard to think of this. It was very hard, too, to feel that at twenty-three he was going to be cast forth on that London world where it is so difficult or so easy to make one's way. Robert had a bitter and uneasy consciousness that, when weighed according to the severe standard of merit, he would be found deficient; that he had not been in the best of schools, and that to leave Mr. George's office was, in itself, no recommendation. And, as he felt all this, his heart swelled with secret resentment against his father. Why had he ever accepted for him that situation, which was the price of his sin, and which had led him into the temptation that now proved his undoing? Of course if he had been in another house, thrown on himself, and not aware, as he had been, that his employer dare not cast him off, he would have grown up a different man. He would have acquired a sounder knowledge of business, striven to rise through other means than the possession of a guilty secret.

"Who knows, though, when he finds me a match for him,

whether the man's fears will not make him give in?" thought Robert, forgetting in a moment all his anger against his father, and falling back with the readiness of habit into the old track. "I can tell you, Mr. George, that you shall not prevail without a contest."

"Mr. George is out," said the porter who opened to Robert.

"I shall wait for him," answered the young man, and he went up to the office, as if he had business there.

On the staircase he met Mrs. Smith. She stood aside to let him pass, and Robert, courteous and kind as ever, stopped to ask how she was.

She gave him a wild, scared look, and replied, in a low, moaning voice,

"It is wrong, all wrong, Mr. Ford."

"What is wrong, Mrs. Smith?" he asked, with some surprise.

She shook her head and wrung her hands.

"It is a judgment," she said; "a judgment—the Bible says so, Mr. Ford, and every word of the Bible is true."

Robert had never exchanged ten words with Mrs. Smith before, and he began to think that her mind was affected.

"Mr. George will soon come in, I suppose," he said, endeavouring to pass on.

"Soon," and she looked wildly at him, and shook her head most drearily. Robert gave up all hopes of understanding her. He felt that something had happened, but what it was he could not imagine. Barker, the messenger, knew nothing, save that a letter had come in this evening, and that, on receiving it, Mr. George had risen from his dinner, called for a cab in great agitation, and gone off no one knew whither.

After waiting some time, Robert was rising to go, resolving to delay his explanation until the next morning, when he heard Mr. George's voice below. He nerved himself for the coming encounter, armed himself with coolness as Mr. George's step was heard coming up the stair-case; but the step passed by the door, and went up to the second floor. A door opened, and then closed, and Robert even heard a bolt pushed to, and a key turn in the lock; after which a heavy foot began pacing to and fro in the room above with monotonous regularity. He bit his lip—it was plain Mr. George would not see him this evening. It did not matter much; the next day would do as well. As he left the room, and walked out on the landing, Robert met Mrs.

Smith again. She held up her forefinger in token of silence, and whispered in a voice so low as to be almost inaudible :

"Will you wait for me round the church, Mr. Ford ?"

"Certainly," replied Robert ; and though much surprised at so singular a request, he showed no astonishment.

There was a narrow passage which led round the old church to another street behind it ; and that street leading to Holborn was one which Robert often took. He now turned round the church as usual, and leaning against the railings of the church-yard, he looked at the tombstones within with secret loathing. Robert was not sentimental, but to be buried beneath one of those dark mounds of earth ! Faugh ! the mere thought was sickening ! Yet, as Mrs. Smith was not coming, he read the inscriptions on the dingy gas-lit stones. One especially caught his eye :

A N N R H O D E,

AGED EIGHTEEN.

There was no date, no text, no hope of resurrection, and a better life. It was youth and death meeting on that narrow ground, and youth was conquered, and death triumphant. Robert thought of Mab, so young, so fresh, so fair, so charming ! What if such a fate were to overtake her, and lead her to such a grave !

A deep sigh behind him made him look round. He saw Mrs. Smith, whose sad eyes had been reading the same epitaph, and whose pale lips repeated mechanically :

"Aged eighteen !" and she looked at him almost pitifully.

"You had something to say to me," remarked Robert.

"I have," she answered, with another sigh. "Oh, Mr. Ford, I am taking a great liberty, but you have a kind face, and perhaps you will do this for me. There is no one else—no one, indeed, to whom I dare apply."

"What is it, Mrs. Smith ?" asked Robert, in his kindest tones. He was kind by nature ; he was young, too, and accessible to the voice of praise and entreaty.

*The young lady you took tea once with is ill—ill or dying. Mr. George got the news this evening. He would not tell me what it was, but I guessed it. He went to see her, and came back pale as death ; and though I begged and prayed for one word, he locked himself up in his own room, and would not

answer me. Mr. Ford, I reared that child—that young lady, I mean ; if she were my own, I could not love her more than I do. It cuts me to the heart not to know—and I dare not go and ask after her—Mr. George would never forgive me. Oh ! if you would—if you would but inquire,” added Mrs. Smith, clasping her hands, and looking in his face with piteous entreaty.

“Certainly,” replied Robert ; “but in what name—in my own I cannot.”

“I have thought of that,” she eagerly replied ; “if you will but call a cab I shall explain it to you.”

Robert hesitated ; but in her pitiful voice she said again,

“Oh ! do, Mr. Ford—do, for the love of heaven !”

Robert yielded ; an empty cab was passing, he hailed it ; Mrs. Smith entered first, telling the cabman where to drive, and Robert followed her in. He asked at once for the promised explanation.

“Yes, yes, I know,” she eagerly replied, “you must inquire how Miss Redmond is in the name of Mrs. Smith.”

“In your name ?”

“It is my name, but there is another Mrs. Smith, who knows Miss Redmond well, and has been kind to her. She has a son about your age, and they will conclude you are that son—you see.”

Robert saw he was embarked in no very pleasant matter, and though he was too kind to recede, he could not help asking why Mrs. Smith could not make the inquiry herself.

“I dare not,” she whispered ; “I went once, just to see her, and Mr. George knew it, and threatened to turn me out if I ever went near her again, and they know me, so I cannot go ; oh ! Mr. Ford, if I could, if I could even ask any one else to do this, would I have dared to trouble you ?”

Robert bade her not distress herself, and no more was said until they both reached the end of their journey, Clarendon House.

It was an old brick mansion, built in the days of Queen Elizabeth, and which, after passing through the hands of many a lordly owner, had now become a fashionable boarding school. Heavy and solemn-looking trees grew around the ancient house ; the grounds and garden were vast, and a farm was even attached to them. Stateliness characterized an abode which, if tradition spoke truly, had been regal in the days when miles of country separated London from places that have since become its suburbs. Robert alone alighted from the cab, and rang the bell ;

through the bars of the iron gate he could see the brown, ivy-covered front of the building, with its small-paned windows and stone porch, and tall square chimneys. A porter came out of a lodge, and, looking at Robert, inquired his business, without attempting to admit him.

"I came to ask how Miss Redmond is this evening."

"In whose name?"

"Mrs. Smith's."

"I shall go and inquire, sir, but I cannot let you in, it is against the rules; you must wait here, if you please."

He went to the house as he spoke, and returned in about five minutes.

"Very bad news, sir," he said; "Miss Redmond has diptheria, and is not expected to live."

Robert was shocked; a low moan from the cab told him Mrs. Smith had heard all. He entered it hastily, and bade the cabman drive them back to the spot where he had taken them up, for the porter looked curiously at the vehicle, with evidently aroused suspicions.

Mrs. Smith was pale as death, and shook in every limb.

"It is a judgment," she said several times, "it is a judgment."

It was a judgment; Robert felt it such, and no words of consolation could rise to his lips.

"Here we are, sir," said the cabman as they reached the old church. It was night now, for they had had a long drive, but the grey stones of the graves still glimmered in the flickering gaslight. Mrs. Smith alighted without a word; she left Robert to discharge the cabman and pay the reckoning; she did not even thank him; she staggered away, reeling with anguish.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE church clock struck eleven as Robert stood alone in the silent street. He counted the strokes one by one, hoping to cool the fever of his blood. The great crisis was at hand; he was destined after all to be Mab's avenger, and to become the instrument of that Providence which was chastising Mr. George so sorely. He knew the child would die; he did not wish for her death, though he speculated upon it, but he knew she would die. He felt it, and on that certainty he built. She would die, and with her would perish her father's strength. Mr. George should

purchase immunity at the cheap cost of disinheriting a brother whom he detested; for the present, however, there was nothing to be done. He had waited years, he could wait a few days longer. In the meanwhile he would say nothing at home, "and I do hope they are not sitting up for me," he thought, as he turned towards Queen's Square.

Vain hope! Although William and Edward had assured her, with the strong nerves of their sex, "that it was all right," and had gone to bed, Miss Lavinia would be uneasy at Robert's absence, and Mab, who sat up with her, shared, if not her anxiety, at least her saddened mood. She had never before had a serious disagreement with "dear Robert," and she felt this sorely. She ran and opened for him when his welcome knock was heard at the door, and looking up appealingly in his face, she said,

"Do not be angry with me, Robert, do not."

"Angry, my dearest Mab! it is you who should not be angry with me. I urged you too much."

To Miss Lavinia, who came out in tears, Robert generously held out his hand. She would willingly have kissed it. Dear, excellent Robert, he had forgiven them! Robert hastened to get out of the reach of this unseasonable gratitude. He could not bear to hear Mab and his aunt thanking him for not having succeeded in making Mab break the solemn promise, which, though he knew it not, was to save him from becoming Mr. George's dupe. He hurried up-stairs, pleading fatigue, and, to avoid all troublesome explanations with his brothers, he left early the next morning and breakfasted at a coffee-house on his way to the office.

Mr. George was out—Robert could guess where, and on what errand. Mr. George remained out all day, and Robert worked alone. Mrs. Smith knocked once at his door and came in, with her sad and anxious look.

"Mr. Ford," she entreated, "will you go again this evening?"

To do Robert justice, there was no thought of self mingling in his reply:

"Indeed I will." But he could not help adding, "I suppose Mr. George is there?"

"He is—he went this morning, and he has not come back. Mr. Ford, do you really think she will die?"

She looked most pitifully in his face, imploring consolation. Robert could not answer, he did not think the child would live, and he was not skilled in the task of administering fallacious

hopes to sick and aching hearts. She understood his silence, and left the room without another word. Robert waited half-an-hour beyond his time, still Mr. George did not come back. It was useless to remain: he rose, locked his desk, and went down-stairs. Half-way on the staircase he met Mrs. Smith.

"What shall we do?" she whispered. "Oh! Mr. Ford, what shall we do?"

Robert was going to reply by making an appointment with her in the vicinity of the boarding-school, when a cab was heard stopping at the door. Without a word Mrs. Smith swiftly descended, to read her doom in a look. Robert followed her more slowly, but with the same object—he, too, wanted to know.

Mr. George was alighting from the cab. Robert never forgot his face. It was not so much pale as ghastly. Here sorrow had been conquered by despair, the despair of some wild animal robbed of its young. No need of a second look—all was over, over for ever in this world. Mrs. Smith stared at her master, mute in her piteous misery. Robert's heart sickened as he witnessed their double agony. Mr. George did not see them at first; it may be that he saw nothing just then, that all external objects lost their power over his dulled sense.

"Close the shutters, Barker," he said, hoarsely. "Mrs. Smith."

"Yes, sir."

"Draw down the blinds."

Mrs. Smith passively went up-stairs to obey. Mr. George looked at Robert, who was leaving the house. Robert stopped.

"Shall I come to-morrow, sir?" he asked.

Mr. George's eyes kindled. He looked as if he would have liked to rend him to pieces, and in a savage tone he answered:

"Yes—what are you paid for?"

Robert scorned to resent the insolent tone and words—there are moments when our worst enemy is weak to offend us as a little child.

Robert's explanation to his brothers, that evening, was comprised in the words, "Mr. George has lost a near relative," and Mab and Miss Lavinia had to be satisfied with this too—for Robert had never taken them so far into his confidence as to tell them a word of Mr. George's private history. Robert and Mr. George did not meet on the following day, and the young man had little or nothing to do save to read the newspaper. Mr. George's business was most elastic. Robert had always known that, in point of fact, it was little better than a screen for secret

transactions, the nature of which he was shrewd enough to divine, though they had never been brought too closely under his notice; and now that he knew Mr. George's intentions, he could not wonder at the inaction in which he was left. Thus passed three days, during which Robert sat idly at his desk, with even the prospect of the old church excluded by the yellow blinds, and with nothing to engage his mind but the arguments, or, better still, the policy that should prevail over the remorseless craft of Mr. George.

On the morning of the fourth day they met. Was the funeral over, or had something occurred which compelled Mr. George's attention to business? Robert did not find him so much altered as he had expected. Mr. George's features were rigid and pale, but his manner was cool, and, if anything, more collected than usual. He spoke to Robert precisely as if nothing had ever taken place, and was so clear-headed and business-like, that the young man resolved to bring the matter in his thoughts to a speedy issue. But on the first words he uttered, Mr. George rose, looked at his watch, and drily saying, "I have an appointment," he left the room, and Robert saw him no more that day.

"He mistrusts me," thought the young man; "I must compel him to listen the next time we meet."

Everyone at Queen Square noticed his abstracted manner that evening. Robert was convinced now that Mr. George meant to escape him, and he was obliged to confess inwardly that he could do so very easily. Now then was the time for ready wit, and skill, and daring; for if the golden hour went by, and Mr. George once got out of his reach, Robert felt he had neither the means nor the inclination to follow his victim. That Mr. George had deluded him all along, and intended flight, Robert felt certain. He only wondered that so evident a fact had never occurred to him.

He was sitting alone in the garden, perplexing himself with these thoughts, when Miss Lavinia came to him with startled looks, sufficiently explained by the nature of her message. A lady in deep mourning, with a thick crape veil, was in the hall, waiting there to speak to Robert. She had refused to enter the parlour, and would not tell her name. Robert rose hastily, went to the hall, where the stranger still stood, and after exchanging a few words with her, he took down his hat, and they walked out together. Miss Ford remained speechless. The staid and sober Robert walking out with an unknown lady!

"What is it, Mrs. Smith?" asked Robert, when they stood in the square.

Instead of answering, Mrs. Smith wept and sobbed so violently, that she was obliged to lean against the railings.

"It will soon be over," she gasped; "but oh!—it was such a judgment!"

Robert did not say one word; he allowed her to grow calm. He was prepared to listen, but he was resolved not to question. He did not think Mrs. Smith was acting a part—but Mr. George might discover her absence, question her, and perhaps indict Robert for conspiracy. Everything was possible with such a man.

"Mr. Ford," said Mrs. Smith, when she was more composed, "you know something of the young lady's history."

"What young lady?"

"At your house, sir."

"I?" exclaimed Robert.

"I am sure you do, or he would not hate and fear you so."

Robert said nothing, but thought this was good to know.

"I know I can trust you," she resumed; "I am sure you will not betray me, and I can tell you enough without betraying him either; for I must not—I cannot do that. All I want, Mr. Ford, is that the poor young lady should get that half of her fortune which Captain George did not have. He will have plenty of money left, and it is not good for his soul to have that."

Robert knew that fifteen thousand pounds lying by ten years with interest and compound interest would not make so small a portion of Mr. George's fortune as Mrs. Smith imagined, but he did not think it needful to enlighten her. He kept firm to his resolve not to speak.

"Mr. Ford," she asked, "what do you know?"

"The question is not what I know," said Robert, coldly; "but what you have to tell me."

Mrs. Smith shrank from him timidly.

"You mistrust me," she said; "well—no matter; it is but right I should suffer. Oh! if the judgment had not been worse than that! Oh! if I could have kept it away by speaking sooner."

She moaned aloud, and wrung her hands. Robert was touched, but he would not commit himself.

"At least you know her name?" she resumed.

"There is no need to mention names," quickly interrupted Robert; "have you facts to state?—that is the question."

"I cannot—I dare not tell you much," she whispered, "it would ruin him—and I must not do that; but if I tell you what will make him give up the money, will it not do?"

"As you please," was all Robert said.

"And even that I can only tell you on condition," she whispered again; "you must promise to use the knowledge as I shall tell you—in no other way; I know I can rely on your word—do you promise?"

"I do," replied Robert, after a pause.

"Well, then, you will tell him this—bring it in as you like—'What has become of Widow Lawrence's child?' and if that will not do, say something about Westdean Lodge; but mind you say no more—for if he finds you are really ignorant, he will laugh at you, and scorn you. Mind you say no more, Mr. Ford."

"That will never do, Mrs. Smith," decisively replied Robert; "I cannot act in the dark. I am willing to say no more than you wish—but I must know the meaning of my own words."

"I cannot—I dare not!" said Mrs. Smith, seeming terrified.

"Well, then, let it be as if you had not spoken." She wrung her hands again.

"He must not keep that money," she said; "he must not, Mr. Ford, or the dreadful judgment will reach him too."

Robert did not answer, but waited. In vain! Mrs. Smith could not decide on speaking more openly. He felt sure she would yield in the end, but he chose to act as if he thought she would not.

"You will think over it, Mrs. Smith," he said quietly. "Good evening."

"No, no," she cried, eagerly seizing his arm, "I cannot let you go, Mr. Ford, I cannot. What is it you want to know?"

"I want to know nothing; but I will not speak on the authority of the words you have uttered—no man in his senses would."

"I suppose not. Besides, I know you mistrust me."

Again Robert was moved, but prudence forbade him to relent.

"All I can tell you is this," said Mrs. Smith, speaking with a violent effort, "and I suppose I have a right to say it—for, God forgive me, I was the guilty one. There was a Widow Lawrence, I will not tell you where she lived, nor yet her real name, for it was not Lawrence. She had a consumptive child, and that child died under the name of another—do you understand?"

"Quite well."

"As to Westdean Lodge, I will not say more about it than that it was the name two brothers gave a large old house where they kept a child. But its real name I will not tell you."

"With whom was the child?" asked Robert, questioning for the first time.

"With me."

"With you alone?"

"With me, and another who is dead. God forgive her, and forgive me, wretched, miserable sinner!"

"Then it was you who took the child and left it at our door?"

"It was. Oh! God forgive me! it was a dreadful thing! And see, Mr. Ford, God's judgment overtook me. I had wronged a child, and a child suffered. Oh! what had *she* done? Why did the judgment fall upon her? Oh! Mr. Ford, was it just? Don't answer. I am talking wickedness. And now, mind your promise, say no more than I told you——"

"Stop," interrupted Robert, "will you not be suspected?"

"I do not think so. I am not the only one who knew these things—he may think you got the information otherwise—by looking for it, perhaps. And even if I were suspected, what matter about me? Is it not right *I* should suffer? Oh! why did I not speak earlier? And now, Mr. Ford," she added, growing calm again, "mind my last words, see Mr. George *to-night*. If you see him and speak to him, you are all right—he will not stir out, see him to-night."

She did not wait for Robert's answer, but left him swiftly, going down Great Ormond Street.

For an hour and more Robert walked about the square. Never had conscience, greed, and prudence striven so hard for mastery as they now did in this young man's soul. It was a fearful contest. Every now and then his better nature prevailed, and made him turn back to the house where his conscientious aunt and innocent little Mab sat waiting for him. It was shameful, and he felt it, to use falsehood and deceit even to Mr. George. But then it was hard to allow the guilty man to escape with his booty, and to condemn Mab, his victim, to poverty. From the moment that Robert took this view of the subject, his scruples lessened, until they vanished. Without further hesitation he turned towards Holborn, and he never stopped until he stood at Mr. George's door. The house was very dark and silent, yet steps within came down in answer to his loud,

ring; the door was unbarred and unlocked, and Mr. George himself appeared on the threshold, with a candle in his hand. He did not ask what brought Robert at so unusual an hour; he let him in, locked and bolted the door behind him, then walked upstairs without uttering a word. "He guesses why I have come," thought Robert, following him; and perhaps Mr. George did guess, perhaps something in Robert's face, or some secret intuition of his own heart, told him what brought the young man to him that evening. But even when they reached the official rooms, Mr. George did not question; he sat down in his arm-chair, leaned back, and joining the tips of his fingers, rested his chin upon them, looking at Robert with a cool fixed glance, but still without speaking. Robert's attack was prompt and open:

"Mr. George," he said, "may I remind you of the promise you made with regard to my brothers?"

"The situations are no longer in my gift," calmly replied Mr. George; "but it shall make no difference—I will take your brothers on the same terms."

Robert smiled scornfully, and did not perceive that Mr. George wanted to ascertain how much he knew.

"Mr. George," he said, "my brothers cannot accept the position you offer them. They are not suited to it."

"Just so," replied Mr. George.

"And to be plain with you, I do not think you want them."

"Well, perhaps I do not, Ford, perhaps I do not."

"I even doubt if you want me, Mr. George. I have been told you are relinquishing business."

Mr. George arched his eyebrows, but gave no other answer.

"So you see, Mr. George," continued Robert, speaking rather sharply, "we have been proceeding on an erroneous basis altogether."

"Just so," placidly said Mr. George—"just so."

Robert was silent.

"On what basis do you suggest that we should act?" inquired Mr. George, after a pause.

Robert smiled.

"That, sir," he replied, "I leave to you."

They exchanged two long looks of hatred and defiance; then Mr. George, probably feeling sure of his ground, rose, and pointing to the door, said sharply,

"That, sir, is my answer. Begone—and show your face here no more."

Robert had stood the whole time; he was leaning with his back to the fireplace, not far from Mr. George's chair; he now smiled without moving.

"Why, no," he said, "that will not do, Mr. George—that will never do. Since you cannot find the right basis on which to act, I must help you. Let our basis be Widow Lawrence's child—or, if that will not answer, Westdean Lodge."

Mr. George stared at him like one bewildered.

"I—I do not understand," he faltered, without the least attempt at presence of mind.

"Then I fear it is a hopeless case," replied Robert, taking his hat.

"Stop!—stop!" cried Mr. George; "Mr. Ford, do not go! I entreat you not to go, Mr. Ford."

Mr. Ford kindly allowed himself to be persuaded.

"Take a chair, I beg," continued Mr. George, in great trepidation; "take a seat."

"Thank you," replied Robert, smiling. "A few seconds will do to settle our business."

This brevity seemed to alarm Mr. George greatly; he no doubt suspected that a matter which was to be settled in so short a space of time, must, perforce, be settled, to his disadvantage. He frowned and set his teeth, whilst Robert, in a thoroughly cool and easy tone, resumed:

"You are a rich man, Mr. George, yet with a portion of your wealth I do not meddle. With another portion I do. I expect—nay, I exact—that it shall be settled on Miss Winter."

"In my will, of course," interrupted Mr. George.

"No—not in your will: now, during your lifetime, Mr. George; and settled by a deed you shall have no power to cancel. I need not tell you why—Miss Winter is connected——"

"That will do!" again interrupted Mr. George.

"I do not ask you whether you agree to this," significantly resumed Robert; "of course you do—you cannot refuse. Besides—always, be it understood, out of that portion of your fortune—that you shall present Miss Winter with the sum of ten thousand pounds in ready money. Or, if you prefer it, that you shall secure to her the interest of that sum, the capital to be invested in the public funds, under our joint superintendence."

Mr. George breathed hard, for he expected more: but Robert, taking his hat again, kindly relieved him by saying,

"That is all, Mr. George. You cannot say that I am unjust, unreasonable, or self-seeking, in what I am doing; but do not de-

ceive yourself, the purer my motives are, the more rigid shall I be in exacting the fulfilment of the terms I have laid down. To-morrow morning at eight I shall be here, and I expect this matter to be either settled, or at least far advanced. I need not tell you that it would be futile and, perhaps, dangerous, to attempt evading me.

Mr. George did not answer. He looked crushed and powerless. Defeat was written on his face, and Robert read it there clearly and plainly. Yet Mr. George made an attempt, a futile one, to escape his tormentor.

"I have another appointment to-morrow," he said, after a pause; "come in the evening, Mr. Ford."

Robert smiled.

"Mr. George," he observed, very calmly, "I shall come to-morrow morning at eight. And take my advice—do not leave this house to-night."

Mr. George gave him a scared look. Fear, abject fear, was stamped on that haggard countenance. Robert walked downstairs, with a feeling of conquest and triumph full upon him; and it was justified. Mr. George was beaten, and could not rally; he was by no means a bold, bad man. With him strength and concealment were synonymous, and when concealment failed, strength gave way to shameful weakness.

CHAPTER XX.

THERE is a story which always has taken a strong hold of the popular mind—the story in which one man, seemingly endowed with the powers of Providence, becomes the righteous avenger of the oppressed, and pitilessly crushes the wronger in all the insolence of his strength. Some such story now seemed fulfilled for Robert Ford. In one half hour he had accomplished the object after which his father had vainly striven for years. Mab indeed must remain Mab Winter, and one half of her inheritance was lost, but the other half, in itself a handsome fortune, was within his grasp. With exultation and pride, too, Robert looked back over his own conduct; he was making Mab a rich woman to his own cost. He had struck no selfish no dishonorable bargain; he had exacted restitution, and nothing more. "She can marry Frederick Norton if she likes," thought Robert as he walked down the street; "I will take no mean advantage of her promise. 'Mab,' I will say to her, 'you are free; you are a rich woman,

now, it would not be honorable in me to bind you to a promise you made when we were both poor. Moreover my pride will not allow me to marry an heiress when I am penniless ; and whether your feelings change or remain what they are, we must proceed on a new basis.' The word basis, which had lately been used in the brief dialogue between Robert and Mr. George, recalled the young man's thoughts to business. He looked around him. He was not far from Chancery Lane, and in that legal neighborhood precisely was it expedient that he should be, in order to get hold of Mr. Samuel Long. This gentleman was clerk to an eminent solicitor, and Robert believed him to possess a considerable knowledge of the law. He knew him more intimately than Mr. Josiah Webster, and justly had the highest opinion of his integrity and discretion. But Mr. Long spent his evenings out, and Robert called on him, prepared with an appointment for an early hour the next morning. Fortune, however, which is said to favour the brave, now so far favoured Robert Ford, as to confine to his room with a severe cold, the individual whom he was seeking.

"Here I am in my attic," said Mr. Long, as Robert entered the very comfortable room on the second floor of a respectable house near Lincoln's Inn, which he thus ignominiously designated. For though Mr. Long had no personal acquaintance with Mr. Josiah Webster, he was as great a contrast to that gentleman as if it had been the purpose of his life to be such. He called his room an attic, he disliked science, he was fond of good living, and he scorned the conventionalities. He wore shabby clothes, and took pride in them ; and he talked so much about his poverty, that many people were convinced he was to come into something handsome.

This was Samuel Long in his private capacity ; but there was a professional Samuel Long, who was a very different sort of a fellow indeed from the private one, and him Robert Ford now sought. He had no time to lose in finessing, and at once came to the purpose.

"Have some grog," said Mr. Long. "I take it on principle : the best thing for a cold."

"Have you been taking much of it ?" uneasily asked Robert.

"Why, no, only a glass or two. Why so ?"

"My dear Long, I want your assistance on some most urgent business."

"Legal ?"

Robert nodded.

Mr. Long shook his head and looked extremely grave. The intimacy of professional men is rarely favourable to a high amount of reverence for the profession they represent. Doctors, for instance, are the most reckless of men, and act as if medicine were the merest fiction; but no one could charge Mr. Long with slighting the law, or holding it up to the contempt of his friends by the slight value he set upon it. The law was a subject on which he did not speak willingly, and on which he was never explicit.

"You don't know the law," was his invariable reply to those persons who made light of it in his presence. Mr. Long did not say that he loved, feared, admired, or despised the law himself; but he never lost an opportunity of impressing his hearers with the fact that the law was a great thing. Accordingly, when Robert nodded, to imply that he had come on legal business, Mr. Long looked extremely grave; and, after a pause, said, in a tone of solemn condolence:

"I am sorry to hear it, my dear fellow."

"The business is not exactly my own," answered Robert.

Mr. Long extended his hand.

"Stop at once, have nothing to do with it," he exclaimed, emphatically. "You are safe yet, stop at once, I say."

"I cannot stop, Long."

"Poor fellow! Well, go on, then."

"You know, I dare say, Miss Winter's singular history!"

"I have heard it related; but, excuse me, Ford, it is by no means singular. There are dozens such come constantly in our way."

"I have no doubt about it; but pray hear me."

"Go on," said Mr. Long again, stretching out his hand, but this time towards his glass; Robert, however, quietly removed it.

"No, no, Long, please," he said briefly, "I tell you it is most important business."

Mr. Long looked resigned. Robert continued:

"I cannot tell you Miss Winter's real name, though I know it; suffice it to say that she is, or was, an heiress, and was put out of the way ten years ago."

"You will never be able to prove it," said Mr. Long. "I defy you to prove it. I defy a man to prove anything."

"I shall not try, my dear fellow; but do hear me out."

"Go on."

"Well, part of her property is in the hands of my employer, Mr. George."

Mr. Long whistled.

"Of course this is confidential," said Robert.

"Of course it is."

"Well, Mr. George, on becoming aware of his unpleasant position, has had qualms of conscience. He wishes to restore Miss Winter her property, but in a private though sure way, and, not choosing to trouble his solicitors, has applied to me to procure him the sort of deed he wants. Mr. George also wishes Miss Winter to enjoy the interest of a certain sum during his lifetime. This, too, requires to be settled by to-morrow morning, and this is the business that brings me to you."

"Too bad, Ford," feelingly said Mr. Long, "too bad. You actually want to *do* me. To talk of Mr. George's conscientiousness! I call it unprincipled to attempt to deceive your legal adviser. However, I will advise you. Make haste and get out of this dangerous affair."

"Mr. George is a coward," said Robert, dropping all feint, "an arrant coward!"

"Then you are lost—lost! You don't know the law. Get out of it."

Robert was staggered; he hesitated, then stamped his foot, half angrily:

"Nonsense. I know the man, I tell you," he said, "and he dare not resist or draw back. I tell you he dare not."

"You say he is a coward, and I tell you a coward will dare and do anything to get rid of danger. Besides do you suppose he will not get advice, legal advice?"

"I tell you, Long, his case is too black to be told by him to living creature."

"My dear Ford, this is nonsense, dreadful nonsense. That man will hide nothing—nothing from his legal adviser, and he will ruin you. Marry a beggar, Ford, rather than Miss Winter, with such a dowry."

Robert reddened. He had not told Mr. Long that he wished to marry Mab, but that gentleman gave him a proof of his legal acumen in taking the fact as granted. After this, concealment might be pernicious. He, accordingly, with as little disguise as his pride allowed, related the whole story, exactly as it had occurred. Mr. Long was horrified.

"Why, it is worse, much worse, than I thought," he exclaimed. "Good heavens! Ford, why did you not come to me at once, and I would have told you in a moment: don't meddle in anything of the kind."

"I am afraid I should not have followed your advice," impatiently replied Robert; "for even now I will not follow it, and that is the long and the short of it."

"I never knew such infatuation!" exclaimed Mr. Long, "never!"

Robert rose.

"I am sorry to have troubled you," he said, shortly, "but, as you cannot assist me, and as I have no time to lose, I must apply elsewhere."

"Sit down," resignedly answered Mr. Long; "it is cruel of me to yield, quite cruel, but you will have it so. Sit down and tell me again the whole story."

Robert sat down and told him everything once more. He also explained his views more fully. When he ceased, Mr. Long said, ruefully:

"Is that all?"

"All," emphatically answered Robert.

"Well, you know my opinion—I need not repeat it. You are a ruined man! However, you will have it so. Come to-morrow morning, early. Good night, Ford."

Thus they parted—Mr. Long deeply depressed at his friend's gloomy prospects, Robert secretly disturbed at the dangers of the enterprise on which he was embarked. The triumphant mood in which he had left Mr. George had subsided. Success no longer seemed so probable; and some of the perils which, in the course of their lengthened conversation Mr. Long had pointed out, were sufficiently evident to startle Robert, spite his ignorance of the law.

He walked about Lincoln's Inn in a state of much agitation. Should he withdraw from this undertaking—should he persist in it? After an hour spent in secret debate, Robert resolved on persevering. Come what would, Mr. George should not prevail over him without having had to fight a hard battle for the victory. He felt somewhat calmer as he came to this decision, and turned homewards. He reached Queen Square as twelve struck. It was Mab who opened to him.

"Oh! Robert!" she exclaimed, "what a fever of anxiety we have been in—and how dreadfully ill you look! Has anything happened?"

"Nothing, my dear—I am tired."

"Robert, there is something—what is it?"

"Nothing—it will be over to-morrow."

Miss Lavinia, who had been crying in the parlour, came out,

and looked wistfully at him ; but Robert, hastily bidding her a good evening, went up to his room, beyond the reach of questioning eyes.

The two women exchanged looks. Ay, something had happened, but what could it be ? It did not lessen the alarm of Miss Ford, whose room was near Robert's, to hear him walk about all night. She got up early, and, stealing in to Mab, who was still fast asleep, she wakened her gently. Mab opened her eyes, and leaning upon one elbow, looked at Miss Lavinia's pale face with much surprise.

"My dear," said the elder lady, "dear Robert did not go to bed last night ; you are quite right, something has happened. You must get up, and have a talk with him this morning ; perhaps he will have confidence in you."

Mab looked very serious.

"He will tell me nothing, aunt," she replied ; "but I shall do as you wish."

She rose, dressed herself, and went and tapped at Robert's door. He asked from within what it was.

"I want you in the garden," answered Mab ; and, without waiting for a reply, she went down. She sat on the bench, and waited there with a beating heart, until Robert appeared. He came and sat by her, and, smiling, quietly asked what she wanted.

"I want to know what ails you, Robert ?—what has happened ?—what is it ?"

"I cannot tell you, Mab," he replied, after a pause ; "to-morrow I dare say I shall be free to speak, but this day—I cannot and will not disguise it from you—is a momentous day in your history and in mine. Whatever happens, Mab, remember that I acted for the best, and if the world should turn against me, you will be just to me, I know."

Mab's very lips turned white as she heard this speech.

"Robert," she said, "what can you do that the world should turn against you ? What can you do ?"

Robert reddened, and rose, as he answered—

"I told you I could not tell you, and you see that I have said too much—since I have roused a sort of mistrust in you. But you will do me justice to-morrow, Mab."

"Dear Robert, I do you justice now and I have faith in you, and I will be patient—indeed, I will ; but if you love us, oh ! Robert ! do not get into danger of any sort—do not, Robert."

She took his hand in the ardour of her entreaty. He smiled and spoke cheerfully ; but though Mab did not repeat their con-

versation to Miss Lavinia, that lady's worst fears were confirmed, for Robert left the house without taking any breakfast. He went at once to Mr. Long's. He found that gentleman in his attic, still in bed, and very low-spirited.

"My dear Ford," he said, "I have not slept a wink all night for thinking of you. Allow me to remonstrate once more. I am sure that when you have heard me out you will assuredly give up this dangerous enterprise."

"My dear fellow," replied Robert, leaning back in his chair with a quiet smile, "I did not sleep last night for thinking of this dangerous enterprise, as you call it. I weighed every chance for and against it, and I came to the conclusion that I cannot recede from it without shame and dishonour. It may be that the means I take are objectionable, or rather incomplete; but I do what I can—not what I should wish to do. I do not restore to Miss Winter her name and position, but I give her back what is left of her wealth. That man gets off more cheaply than he deserves in keeping what shreds of reputation he still possesses. Let him do his worst against me—I do not, I will not fear him. I tell you I am prepared for the worst—for a policeman in the next room, and a charge of extortion. I am prepared for it, without apprehending it; he is too guilty to venture on so desperate a remedy; and now that I have set the matter right, allow me to ask if those papers are ready?"

"My dear fellow," compassionately said Mr. Long, "here are your papers, but don't thank me. I have been putting a rope round your neck. Moreover, do not suppose they will answer your purpose—they are only trifles—you don't know the law. The law of this country is very strict with voluntary deeds. It does not like them; it never helps them—it regards them with great suspicion."

"Does it cancel them?" asked Robert.

"When it is proved that they are obtained by undue influence, certainly."

Robert winced.

"Is it possible?" he said, impatiently, "that so simple a matter——"

"Simple!" interrupted Mr. Long, "there is nothing simple when you have to deal with an unwilling or a dishonest man."

"Why, no," answered Robert, struck with the remark, "you are right enough there. Nevertheless, I must go on with what I have begun, and see if I cannot keep that man to his word. It is seven now, I told him eight—shall I sit with you till the time comes?"

"Do, and I shall accompany you—not to the house—but having, however unwillingly, participated in the matter thus far, I am curious to see the end of it."

Robert laughed; it was plain Mr. Long expected to see him come out of Mr. George's abode in a cab, escorted by two police officers.

"I think we can go now," he said, as half-past seven struck.

"Very well," replied Mr. Long, "very well."

They walked out slowly, arm in arm. The morning was warm and still—the streets were already crowded. The throng lessened as they reached that part of the city in which Mr. George lived.

"I think you had better drop my arm," said Robert to his friend. "We might meet some one, Mr. George himself, and it is best I should not be accompanied."

"Ford!" impressively said Mr. Long, "it is time yet—think over it—it is time yet."

"It is a quarter to eight," answered Robert; and, dropping Mr. Long's arm, he walked on.

"There is a fire somewhere," said Mr. Long, as a strong smell of burning suddenly filled the street along which they were walking.

Even as he spoke, a huge cloud of smoke spread across the sky. They quickened their step. The cloud increased; the sky was blackened over their heads. They heard shouts, too, and tumultuous exclamations. As they turned the corner, the dismal scene came full in view. Surrounded by a vast crowd, stood a burning house; it faced an old church, of which the window-panes glittered again with the reflection of the flames, and Robert knew it well. Two engines were in full play, and had been so for hours, the young men heard, not to save that house—it was doomed—but those next it and the buildings opposite.

"I know nothing so grand as a fire!" enthusiastically exclaimed Mr. Long; "and there is no place like London for fires, unless it be Constantinople, I believe. I hope there is no one in that house, though!" he added, addressing his neighbour, a working man with his bag of tools on his shoulder.

"No one, sir. All gone hours ago."

Even as he spoke, there rose a great cry, followed by a sudden silence. The flames had not yet reached the upper windows. One of these suddenly opened, and a man's face and figure appeared in the lurid glare. A hundred voices shouted "The fire-escape!—the fire-escape!" but before the words had died away

—before the wretched man's waving arms had finished a frantic gesture for help—he had vanished; the floor beneath him had given way, and he had sunk down into the fiery gulph below.

A deep awe-struck stillness followed the tragic incident. After this the rest was nothing—a tame battle between fire and water. Ere long the flames were conquered: liquid torrents beat them back whenever their forked heads appeared. The roof sank in with a crash, and there remained a gaunt spectre-like mass, on which the water still poured with steady force.

“Very shocking!” said Mr. Long, with a slight shiver, and he looked at Robert Ford.

The young man had neither moved nor spoken since they had come within sight of the fire. He now stood still like one rooted to the stones, but his face was so dreadfully pale, and so extraordinary a change had come over it, that his friend was startled. He shook his arm.

“Rouse yourself,” he said, “it is dreadful of course, but how many yearly die by fire in London alone! I have a great aversion to that sort of death, of course; but still what can we do?”

Robert did rouse himself, but with a strong effort.

“I think I shall go home,” he said, slowly.

“Home!” echoed Samuel Long, “and your appointment? It is just striking eight.”

And so it was. The old church-clock in its brick turret was slowly telling the hour of Robert's appointment with Mr. George. Strange thoughts came into Robert's mind as he heard it. He remembered Mr. George's remark, not much more than a week back:

“What do you suppose is the result of living opposite a church? Why, that one's watch is sure to be always wrong,” and every stroke of the clock sounded like a knell.

“I think I shall go home,” he said again; and, as Mr. Long looked at him with amazement, he added: “That house was his house.”

Mr. Long looked at him.

“Did you know that man?” he asked.

“It was he.”

When the blackened ruins were searched the next day, two charred corpses were found in them. One, a man's, still clasped, with useless force, a small fireproof safe, in which some important papers were found; the other, a woman's, lay not far from what had been Mr. George's room. Both could have been saved. He went back to secure bonds, worse to him than Shylock's—

she remained, not to leave him. Thus both perished in the catastrophe—thus one fate ushered them both to the next world, and the solemn Judgment of God.

CHAPTER XXI.

THEY had not walked far, when Robert, turning round, said to his friend,

“Long, do not take it amiss if I ask you to leave me.”

“No—of course not—of course not,” soothingly replied Mr. Long; “of course you must feel this very much, and yet, my dear fellow, dreadful as this event is in other respects, you are lucky, positively lucky, that it ends thus for you;” and, cordially pressing Robert’s hand, he left him.

Robert Ford walked on. He felt dull, inert, plunged in a painful stupor, from which his will could not rouse him. He did not go home. He wandered about the whole day in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. Never had he known such a day—never did he forget it. Towards dusk he went home. As he passed by the parlour windows of the house in Queen Square, he heard the voices within, and his father’s among the rest.

“So, he has come back,” vaguely thought Robert; “then he, too, has failed.”

There were no lights in the parlour when Robert entered it. He was glad of it, they could not see his face.

“My dear Robert, have you had any dinner?” eagerly asked Miss Lavinia.

“Thank you, aunt, I want none,” he replied; and he sat down on an end of the sofa.

A deep silence followed; his voice sounded hollow and strange, but no one questioned him.

“Are you going to get lights?” crossly asked Mr. Ford, and he began walking up and down the room with his hands in his pockets.

“He has failed; it is all over!” thought Robert. There was no reason why he should keep his gloomy tidings to himself, and the sooner the bitter task of telling them was over, the better. “A great calamity has occurred,” he said, slowly. There was a breathless silence, even Mr. Ford stopped short. Robert continued: “Mr. George’s house in the City is burned down, and Mr. George has perished in it.”

The door opened, and Lucy came in bearing the lights. Mab,

Miss Lavinia, who sat near the window, were very pale; the two young men, near them, were deeply disturbed; but Mr. Ford, standing in the centre of the room, looked the picture of grief and despair.

"And who is Mr. George's heir?" he asked in a voice full of woe.

"Captain George, of course," replied Robert.

Mr. Ford groaned aloud.

"It is the curse of God!" he said; "it is the curse of God!"

None present understood the words, save his eldest son. Ay, it was the curse of God indeed, for Mr. Ford had failed; Mab was not righted yet—and the wealth which Mr. George had carefully hoarded for years, Captain George would quickly spend.

"Fifteen thousand pounds lying by ten years," said Mr. Ford; "fifteen thousand pounds!"

"My dear John," faltered Miss Lavinia, "what is it?—what ails you?"

"I tell you it is fifteen thousand pounds," said Mr. Ford, with a sort of cry. "Fifteen thousand pounds lying by for ten years."

Robert rose, and, taking his father's arm, led him into the garden.

"For God's sake, be calm!" he entreated, himself much agitated.

"Robert, it is the curse of God!" pitifully said his father; "it is the curse of God that is on me, my boy!"

But Robert still entreated and argued. Mr. Ford heard him with a sort of sullen resignation, then, stung with shame, he rose abruptly and left the house. The young man went back to the parlour. No allusion was made to Mr. Ford's strange conduct, and Robert did his best to make it be forgotten, by relating the accident in full.

"How dreadful!" said Miss Lavinia.

"It is a great calamity," said Robert; "and we are sufferers, too. I lose my situation, of course, and William and Edward lose the chance I have been so long seeking for them."

"How so?" eagerly asked William; "the situations were promised."

"My dear boy," interrupted Robert, "I have strong reasons to believe that Mr. George deceived me in that matter; at the same time, I would in some manner or other have made him

keep his promise ; but his death puts an end to all such projects. As you are, you must remain, and I am utterly cast adrift."

Miss Lavinia could not bear the deep despondency of Robert's voice, she burst into tears, and left the room. William whistled, and looked steadily out of the window, whilst Edward kicked the floor with his foot. Mab went and sat on the sofa by Robert.

"Dear Robert," she whispered, passing her arm within his and looking up in his face, "you will do well yet."

"I hope so," he replied, calmly ; "will you get me a cup of tea, Mab ?"

She rang the bell, and made the tea ; neither Mr. Ford nor his sister appeared to partake of the meal. It was silent and cheerless. When it was over, William and Edward went out, and Mab remained alone with Robert. Again she attempted consolation ; but she did not know how deep the wound lay, nor how great a share she had in its bitterness ; Robert heard her out, then said with an impatient sigh :

"Mab, it is no use talking so. I told you this morning that this day was a momentous one for us both, and I will not hide from you that it has ended in the deepest ruin. Do not question me, do not ask to know more. I cannot speak. The secret is no longer mine ; death has its share in it ; but believe me when I say that my case is hopeless. You see these papers," he added, drawing forth from his breast pocket a packet of blue foolscap, tied with red tape, "well Mab, this morning they were wealth and a competency, and if you want to know what they are this evening, look at them."

He lit them at the flame of the candle as he spoke, and, throwing them on the hearth, saw them burn and shrivel there with the gloomiest mien Mab had ever see him wear.

"Robert, you have no confidence in me," she very sadly said.

"I tell you, Mab, the secret is not mine," he replied, rather sharply ; "and, indeed, I should never have told you so much as I did tell you this morning."

"Robert, you told me nothing," replied Mab, much hurt ; "you have lived in mysteries for the last week."

There was a long pause. At length Robert spoke.

"Mab," he said, in a voice that faltered slightly, "you must have faith in me, you must believe that I love you."

"I do believe it, Robert, I do—but why do you speak so ?"

"Because I am going to put your affection, and your faith in

mine, to the proof. I am going to leave you, Mab—I am determined on going to Australia. Do not look at me so. There is nothing to be done here—here a man of pride cannot live.”

“But why should one have pride, Robert?”

“Oh! Mab, do not talk so.”

“I will. Why must we all be so anxious to be rich?—Robert, I am not ambitious.”

“I am, Mab—I am ambitious for you,” replied Robert, looking down at her with fondness and pride. “I will not marry you to make of you a servant of all work. And, even admitting I should get another situation, how are we to live and marry on a hundred or a hundred and fifty pounds a year?”

This was a question Mab did not exactly care to answer. She was in no hurry to marry, in no hurry to be tied, and the vision of the hundred pounds a year income was not a tempting one.

“But why go so far?” she urged.

“Because there is nothing to be done.”

Still Mab objected, but to every objection Robert had a sufficient answer. Despair had taken possession of the young man’s heart. He had built on Mab for a fortune, and now that this hope was wrecked, that Mr. George’s fears were beyond the reach of his menaces, he felt hopeless and powerless. The thought, too, that the spendthrift Captain George would soon revel in the wealth out of which Robert had hoped to carve for himself, Mab, and his brothers, a handsome competency, was poison to his soul. He felt it was a sight he could not look on, and though she little suspected his motives, Mab felt that Robert’s resolve was beyond the reach of her influence. Her tears and her prayers alike remained powerless.

“Oh! Robert!” she said at length, “you do not love me.”

“It is because I love you that I go, Mab.”

The next morning at breakfast, Robert announced his resolve to the family. Miss Lavinia burst into tears, and with broken sobs exclaimed:

“My dear—Robert—may God bless you—wherever you go.”

William and Edward looked excited and approving, but Mr. Ford turned very pale, and said, pathetically:

“No, Bob, no, my boy—you cannot go and leave your old father—no, you can’t do it.”

Such language was very rare from Mr. Ford. Robert was

affected, but though Mab looked at him appealingly, his purpose was not shaken.

"I must go," he said; "I cannot stay here to sink down into a clerk, and there is no other prospect for me. I have not been brought up to a profession, and moreover it will be no particular recommendation for me to have been reared in Mr. George's office."

Mr. Ford felt the reproach, and his nether lip quivered, but he said nothing.

"Moreover," continued Robert, "what are the prospects of my younger brothers? By emigrating I pave them the way; and as I hope and trust, open to them a better and more prosperous career than they could ever hope for in England."

So that was it. Robert did not merely mean to go, he also meant to rob him of his two younger sons. Mr. Ford looked at them. There was no mistaking their eager, hopeful faces. Of course emigration was the thing, and William promptly said so.

"I think Robert's scheme an admirable one," he remarked; "of course he can get a situation at once through Mr. Norton; and when he has got one, he can write over for us, and we shall get situations, too. Everyone says there is no country like Australia for energy and enterprise: America is used up, but Australia is the very thing."

"There is no doubt about it," sententiously said Edward; "England has long been exhausted, unless for capital, but in Australia man is capital, you see."

Mr. Ford rose and left the room. Mab followed him out.

"Uncle, dear uncle," she whispered, following him up the staircase, "bear it better."

Mr. Ford only shook his white hair, without answering her. Still she followed him until they entered the back drawing-room together. Then Mr. Ford threw himself in his chair, and looked piteously at her.

"They will break my heart," he said, "they will break my heart. Oh! Mab, I have deserved it all—but still they should not leave me—they should not leave their old father to die alone! Oh! it is hard, Mab, that he will take away my boys, and that I am nothing in my own house—and no one to my own children!"

Mab felt it was very hard. Her own heart, too, was very sore. She sat on Mr. Ford's knee, she twined her arms around

Mr. Ford's neck, and giving him a passionate caress, she exclaimed, in the fulness of her heart :

"Let them go, uncle—nothing shall ever divide us—nothing—we shall live and die together, come what will!"

"Yes, Mab," said Mr. Ford, returning her embrace, "come what will."

CHAPTER XXII.

NOTHING occurred to shake Robert's resolve. Mr. Ford raised no further opposition to it; and obstacles, few though they were, yielded before Robert's will. The first overcome was that of money. Robert had a small sum by him, but the late Mr. George owed him upwards of fifty pounds; and as the young man was fortunately able to prove his debt, he lost no time in claiming the amount from Mr. George's lucky heir, Captain George. His written application was promptly attended to, and the Captain, with his compliments, politely requested Mr. Robert Ford to call on him in his new apartments, at the west end of the town, next Tuesday, at two of the afternoon. Robert Ford was punctual to the minute—partly because it was his temper to be so, partly because he wished the hateful business over. He found Captain George smoking at the open window of a handsome drawing-room, and looking, as well he might, in high good-humour. Mrs. George he did not see. Her boudoir was evidently no longer identical with Captain George's sitting-room. Nothing could exceed Captain George's affable reception of Robert.

"Very happy to see you," he said, gracefully pointing to a chair; "pray take a seat, Mr. —Ford, ah! yes, Robert Ford, I remember. And so," continued Captain George, throwing his cigar out of the window with cool disregard of the passengers in the street; "and so, Mr. Ford, you want to speak to me. Now, it may spare you some trouble if I tell you plainly that Captain George and Mr. James George always were two very different persons, and are not to be acted upon by the same means—not at all. Perhaps you are not aware, my dear young gentleman, that I am thoroughly well acquainted with the nature of the last conversations that passed between you and my lamented brother—but I am. He reposed that much confidence in me that he repeated to me every word of your kind and well-meant proposals. Now, allow me to tell you, that though you would

never have got a farthing of ready money out of him—James would have died first, poor fellow—it is very likely that you would have done him, or rather have done me out of the very handsome inheritance I have just stepped into. I tell you this, to heighten your natural regret for the loss you have sustained in my dear brother, and also as a little memorial of the conversation which passed between us not two weeks ago. You see, my good young man, what your chance is with me, a very small one. You may tell the whole world, if you like, that I once resided at Westdean Lodge—I shall not deny it; I have no doubt Westdean Lodge was a very pretty place. You may also add, if it should please you to do so, that Widow Lawrence was my housekeeper; thank Heaven, my character is above suspicion, and Mrs. George is above jealousy. In short, you may do exactly what you please,” added Captain George, in the same tone of agreeable banter; “and now that you know a bit of my mind, will you be so good as to tell me your object in seeking for this interview?”

Robert had not sat down, and though boiling with rage at Captain George’s taunts, he looked down at him very calmly, and said in tones of ice: “I called, sir, to request you to settle a bill owing to me by your late brother, and I distinctly mentioned the matter in my note, requesting you at the same time to authorize your solicitors.”

“I have none,” interrupted Captain George. “Ever since Ribs—of course you know Ribs—ever since Ribs attempted to charge me for a conversation held during the dinner to which I had invited him—and such a dinner, the ungrateful vagabond!—ever since then, I say, I have been my own solicitor. Not that I paid him—‘No, no, Ribs,’ I said, ‘that will never do—never.’ But with regard to that matter of yours, Mr. Robert Ford, it is very unlucky that my brother’s books are burned—awkward, eh?”

“Not for me,” drily replied Robert. “The amount due to me is fifty-two pounds, seven shillings, and sixpence, and I am ready to prove my debt this moment.”

“No need—no need,” gracefully replied Captain George; “fifty-two pounds seven shillings and sixpence—make it a round number, say fifty-three pounds;” and Captain George, who was his own banker, as well as his own legal adviser, thrust his hand into his pocket and brought out from its depths five ten-pound notes and three sovereigns, which he tossed on the table with a careless and generous “there!” Robert took up the money,

- counted it, then drew out his purse, counted out twelve shillings and sixpence on the table, and putting by them a stamped receipt for the amount paid to him, he left the room without honouring Captain George with either a word or a look.

Thus ended, and for ever, his fatal connexion with Mab's wrongers, and if anything could have strengthened his wish to leave England, Captain George's galling taunts would have done it.

Far too quickly, to Miss Lavinia's sorrow, passed the days that were to end in Robert's departure. The weather was fine and propitious. Never had a brighter sun shone in clearer skies. This fine weather continued until the evening of the day on which Robert was to sail. On that evening Robert and Mab, sitting on the bench between the two poplar trees in the garden, spoke together for the last time. Robert had wisely refused to let Mab, Miss Ford, and even his brothers, see him on board the next morning. He was to part from them in Queen Square, and his father alone was to accompany him to Gravesend. This therefore was his real adieu to Mab; the family knew it, and no one intruded on their privacy.

Daylight was fading. Mab looked at the sky, of a pale blue towards the zenith, red and glowing in the west. She watched the rising of a bright, liquid star, that seemed to be both ascending and slowly coming forth from the depths of heaven, then suddenly laying her head on Robert's shoulder, she began to cry. He stooped and pressed his lips to her cheek.

"Dear Mab," he said, "if we loved each other less, we should feel it less. It is very hard. Where is our villa on the Thames, with the roses and the swans? Have they villas in Australia, and shall we get one, or rough it in the bush? God knows. I am hopeful, but not sanguine. I shall work hard, send for the boys, and then, when there is a fit home for you, I shall come and fetch you."

"Robert," despondently said Mab, "your departure makes me very unhappy. I almost feel as if I were the cause of your going. Oh! Robert, it is very hard for me to think that if you were not engaged to me, you would not leave home, and aunt, whom it cuts up so much—and uncle, who will not show his grief, though it is the deepest of all. Robert," she added, gathering courage, "it is not too late yet—remain—and let us not marry."

Robert seemed very much hurt to find that Mab could take so philosophic a view of their future fate, and he said with some bitterness :

"Mab, how can you be so cold?"

"I am not cold," replied Mab, very sadly, "but I am poor and proud; and, believe me, Robert, it is a hard trial for a girl to feel that she can be nothing but a burden to the man who marries her."

"Then, Madam Mab, or Queen Mab, you will please to discard all such fancies. Poor and burdensome as you are, I mean to have you, and to let no one else have a chance of you."

Mab blushed a little, but she was pleased, as Robert meant that she should be; for, though she was too proud to show it, she always had an uneasy consciousness that, in his heart, Robert did not care so very much about her.

"No, no," said Robert, smoothing her hair, "no talk of non-engagement, please. I do not release you, and do not want to be released either. We are bound, and thank heaven, it is for life. We will find another Thames, and scarlet geraniums instead of roses, though I dare say there are roses in Australia, and we shall have a sweet and happy home in a few years, Mab."

"Be it so," she replied, and, giving him her hand, she added frankly, "it is for life, Robert."

Early the next morning Robert and Mr. Ford left. The parting was brief, but bitter. Mab almost forgot her own grief in the task of comforting Miss Ford. When the door closed on her darling, and the cab drove away, Miss Lavinia burst into sobs and tears, restrained till then, and exclaimed:

"Mab, I shall never see him again—never, Mab—never!"

Mr. Ford came back in the afternoon. He looked very pale and worn, but spoke little. To Miss Lavinia's fond and eager questions, he gave but brief replies.

"He's gone," he said, mechanically; "I told you so, Livy; he's gone. I never saw him look so like his mother—never."

"And—and what did he say?" sobbed Miss Ford.

"He sent his love to Mab, and you and the boys—but don't tease me, I cannot bear it. I cannot."

Mab went up to him and laid her cheek to his.

"Uncle," she whispered, "I am really and truly to become Robert's wife——"

"Then why did he not stay and marry you?" interrupted Mr. Ford. "I wanted him to do so, but no, he would run away."

"Uncle, he is too poor to marry now, but he must get on, he

is so clever, and, as I said, I am to be his wife, and you shall never leave us—never—and he will send for the boys, and come and fetch us, and we will have a new life and a new home.”

But Mr. Ford shook his head and sighed.

“He is gone, Mab,” he said, “gone for ever; and I asked him to stay and marry you, and he would not;” and Mab, too, sighed, for her heart was sore.

PART III.

M A B ' S F A I T H .

CHAPTER I.

W^e will let three years slip by.

Mab is sitting on the bench in the garden, reading a letter from William, for the two boys long ago joined their elder brother. The letter is bright and hopeful, but Mab's face is clouded. Why did not Robert write? He had no time. He should have had time. Then comes another question: "Why did Robert emigrate?" He is a clerk at Mr. Norton's—could he not have been a clerk in England? Has going so far brought them any the nearer to the goal of their mutual wishes? To all seeming it has not; and, therefore, Mab is grave now; the house is so altered: Mr. Ford and his sister were never very cheerful company, Susan has retired on a pension, even Fancy sleeps in her grave at the root of the poplar tree—nothing is as it used to be.

"Mab," said Mr. Ford, coming up to her with a letter in his hand, "would you like to travel?"

"Like it!" cried Mab, with sparkling eyes.

"Well, then, get ready: the Irish Fords have asked Livy and you to spend the summer with them."

"And you, uncle?"

"I have another journey to take. You must go without me."

"And Captain George has been this morning," thought Mab; "it is always when Captain George comes that uncle travels."

Her curiosity was roused, and she could not help saying aloud :

"Uncle, is it true that Captain George is so very poor ?"

"What !" asked Mr. Ford, much startled, "poor ! did you say poor, Mab ?"

"Ye-es," she replied, slowly ; "is he poor ?"

"Have you been giving him money, Mab ?—have you been giving him money ?"

"Only half-a-crown—and he looks so wretched, uncle."

Mr. Ford stamped his foot, and clenched his fist.

"The vagabond !" he muttered ; "she has been giving him money, she has !"

"I know he is, or was, extravagant," pleaded Mab, "or he could not have run through his brother's money."

"It was not his," said Mr. Ford, angrily ; "it was not. He was a thief—they were thieves—and never give Captain George a shilling, Mab, if you do not want to break my heart."

"But, uncle—why do you see him ?"

Mr. Ford's face became vacant and dull.

"He is useful to me," he said, slowly ; "and I pay him for it—but never give him a shilling, Mab, never. And now, child, do get ready for that journey—do ; and go and tell your aunt."

Mab nodded, and at once went up to Miss Lavinia with the tidings.

"I can't go, Mab," said Miss Ford, sitting down, "I can't."

"Why not, aunt ?"

"I have taken a horror of railway travelling ever since Mrs. Norton told me that dreadful story about the milkmen."

"The milkmen, aunt ?"

"Yes, milkmen, who had been out for a day's shooting, and they had a bag full of rabbits, and were travelling with Mrs. Norton in the same carriage actually. Well, they got playful, as she called it, and they took the dead rabbits out of the bag, and began throwing them at each other, and across Mrs. Norton, until one of them actually hit her ! Mab, I can't go."

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"Don't, uncle," entreated Mab.

"You will like the Irish Fords," he resumed, changing the subject; "but where is Livy? Livy, you will be late."

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"Aunt, we shall be late," said Mab.

"I can't help it," despondently replied Miss Lavinia; "we cannot go. We cannot travel without money, and all my money was in my purse. Get it from the thief—what have I to do with it!"

She looked helpless and desolate.

"Aunt," resolutely said Mab, "you must have the purse; try in your pocket."

But Miss Lavinia shook her head. She was sure the purse was not there.

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"We did not expect you till to-morrow," said Miss Emily, taking the lead, as usual; "are you tired, Lavinia?"

"No—thank you," hesitatingly answered Miss Ford, conscientiously revolving in her mind how far she was tired or not.

"And you are not tired, I am sure," gaily said Miss Ellen to Mab; "you look too blooming for fatigue."

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But "our brother" was in no immediate danger; he was away on business, and was not expected till the next day. Still Mab was confirmed in a suspicion she had already felt; it was Mr. Ford who had asked for, not the Miss Fords who had offered the invitation.

"What a pity there is not a bridge across that nice little river," said Miss Ford, pausing in the unwrapping. "We might have been here much earlier if there had been one."

"A bridge across Shane's river!" exclaimed the two sisters; "You will never see that, Lavinia. Mr. Briggs wanted to have one, but our brother would not allow it."

"I suppose the engineers could not manage it," said Miss Lavinia, looking wise.

The twin sisters knew nothing about that, but their brother would not have a bridge, and so there was an end of it. Miss Lavinia's looks expressed her astonishment.

"And does he then do all that he pleases?" she could not help saying.

It was the turn of the sisters to look surprised.

"Of course he does," replied Miss Ellen, with strong emphasis. "Nothing of a public character is done for miles around without his knowledge or consent. It was he who got the railway branch, in spite of every opposition. But when Mr. Briggs wanted to have the bridge by the sly, our dear brother soon put an end to the matter."

"It is very kind of him to take so much trouble in public business," gravely said Mab; "but how does he find time for it all?"

Miss Emily gave her a searching look; but Miss Ellen, unconscious of lurking irony, replied in her earnest way:

"Our dear brother finds time for everything. It is wonderful even to us. We do not know how he manages it all. Why, to this day we cannot guess how he found out about that bridge, and how he defeated Mr. Briggs—but he did it in twenty-four hours. Some men are born to command, I suppose," she added.

"A formidable power!" said Mab, "and one that must give him his share of enemies."

The two sisters exchanged amazed looks.

"Enemies!" cried Miss Ellen, "why, he is adored. There is not a more popular man in the whole country. As to the servants, I do not exaggerate when I say that they love his little finger better than our whole bodies, and would die for him if need were."

"I am sure they would," said Miss Emily, with perfect composure; "and what is more, I never yet knew man or woman who approached him and could either resist or dislike him. Why, Mr. Briggs himself loves him dearly."

A pretty smile curled Mab's rosy lips, and Miss Lavinia, feeling at a loss what to say, uttered a vague and comprehensive "Indeed!"

Miss Ellen who had slipped out of the room, now put in her

good-tempered face at the door, and uttered the welcome intimation that dinner was waiting.

Miss Emily rose and showed her guests into the dining-room. She took the head of the table and said grace, and the meal, a very plain one, began. Everything, indeed, seemed plain to Mab. The Miss Fords were hospitable and kind, but she was disappointed in them. She found them tame and prosy, and missed the flow of wit and eloquence which she had been prepared to meet in Ireland. Instead of these, she got some statements and opinions that surprised her.

"What a fine view of the sea you must have from that window," remarked Mab, glancing at a large bay window opposite her.

"Oh! no, thank Heaven," emphatically said Miss Emily, shuddering slightly as she spoke.

Mab was too well bred to inquire into the reason of so singular a feeling, but Miss Emily gave it freely.

"We were nearly wrecked when we were girls, Ellen and I, and for years we lived inland, and could not bear to look at water. Our brother has planted trees wherever there is a glimpse of the sea, and though we cannot help hearing it and knowing it is there, we manage never to see it."

Mab supposed they preferred pastoral landscapes; but neither of the sisters expressed any sympathy; the country for them, as Mab indignantly concluded, was fresh air and a farm-yard.

They liked O'Lally's Town, however, and liked both the estate and the name it bore. This led Mab to inquire, in her innocence, if the Irish O'Lallys were related to the French family of Lally Tolendal.

"The French Lally Tolendal family," drily said Miss Emily, "claims to be descended from the Dermot O'Maollalee, whose name has been unfortunately corrupted into O'Lally; but the fact is doubtful; I do not think they have been formally acknowledged. Ellen, my dear, may I trouble you for that fish?—Miss Ford, I insist on your taking more. With regard to those French Lallys, Miss Winter, they are another proof of the different fortunes which await the native Irish at home and abroad. My brother, Mr. O'Lally, lives by his own exertions—a commercial man. Of the vast lands of his ancestors he has not an acre; his birth procures him no distinction, insures him no privilege. The Lally Tolendals of France, on the contrary, from mere soldiers of fortune, rise to the highest distinction."

"One had his head cut off," demurely said Mab.

"Mab, how can you be so cold?"

"I am not cold," replied Mab, very sadly, "but I am poor and proud; and, believe me, Robert, it is a hard trial for a girl to feel that she can be nothing but a burden to the man who marries her."

"Then, Madam Mab, or Queen Mab, you will please to discard all such fancies. Poor and burdensome as you are, I mean to have you, and to let no one else have a chance of you."

Mab blushed a little, but she was pleased, as Robert meant that she should be; for, though she was too proud to show it, she always had an uneasy consciousness that, in his heart, Robert did not care so very much about her.

"No, no," said Robert, smoothing her hair, "no talk of non-engagement, please. I do not release you, and do not want to be released either. We are bound, and thank heaven, it is for life. We will find another Thames, and scarlet geraniums instead of roses, though I dare say there are roses in Australia, and we shall have a sweet and happy home in a few years, Mab."

"Be it so," she replied, and, giving him her hand, she added frankly, "it is for life, Robert."

Early the next morning Robert and Mr. Ford left. The parting was brief, but bitter. Mab almost forgot her own grief in the task of comforting Miss Ford. When the door closed on her darling, and the cab drove away, Miss Lavinia burst into sobs and tears, restrained till then, and exclaimed:

"Mab, I shall never see him again—never, Mab—never!"

Mr. Ford came back in the afternoon. He looked very pale and worn, but spoke little. To Miss Lavinia's fond and eager questions, he gave but brief replies.

"He's gone," he said, mechanically; "I told you so, Livy; he's gone. I never saw him look so like his mother—never."

"And—and what did he say?" sobbed Miss Ford.

"He sent his love to Mab, and you and the boys—but don't tease me, I cannot bear it. I cannot."

Mab went up to him and laid her cheek to his.

"Uncle," she whispered, "I am really and truly to become Robert's wife—"

"Then why did he not stay and marry you?" interrupted Mr. Ford. "I wanted him to do so, but no, he would run away."

"Uncle, he is too poor to marry now, but he must get on, he

is so clever, and, as I said, I am to be his wife, and you shall never leave us—never—and he will send for the boys, and come and fetch us, and we will have a new life and a new home.”

But Mr. Ford shook his head and sighed.

“He is gone, Mab,” he said, “gone for ever; and I asked him to stay and marry you, and he would not;” and Mab, too, sighed, for her heart was sore.

PART III.

M A B ' S F A I T H .

CHAPTER I.

WE will let three years slip by.

Mab is sitting on the bench in the garden, reading a letter from William, for the two boys long ago joined their elder brother. The letter is bright and hopeful, but Mab's face is clouded. Why did not Robert write? He had no time. He should have had time. Then comes another question: "Why did Robert emigrate?" He is a clerk at Mr. Norton's—could he not have been a clerk in England? Has going so far brought them any the nearer to the goal of their mutual wishes? To all seeming it has not; and, therefore, Mab is grave now; the house is so altered: Mr. Ford and his sister were never very cheerful company, Susan has retired on a pension, even Fancy sleeps in her grave at the root of the poplar tree—nothing is as it used to be.

"Mab," said Mr. Ford, coming up to her with a letter in his hand, "would you like to travel?"

"Like it!" cried Mab, with sparkling eyes.

"Well, then, get ready: the Irish Fords have asked Livy and you to spend the summer with them."

"And you, uncle?"

"I have another journey to take. You must go without me."

"And Captain George has been this morning," thought Mab; "it is always when Captain George comes that uncle travels."

Her curiosity was roused, and she could not help saying aloud :

"Uncle, is it true that Captain George is so very poor ?"

"What !" asked Mr. Ford, much startled, "poor ! did you say poor, Mab ?"

"Ye-es," she replied, slowly ; "is he poor ?"

"Have you been giving him money, Mab ?—have you been giving him money ?"

"Only half-a-crown—and he looks so wretched, uncle."

Mr. Ford stamped his foot, and clenched his fist.

"The vagabond !" he muttered ; "she has been giving him money, she has !"

"I know he is, or was, extravagant," pleaded Mab, "or he could not have run through his brother's money."

"It was not his," said Mr. Ford, angrily ; "it was not. He was a thief—they were thieves—and never give Captain George a shilling, Mab, if you do not want to break my heart."

"But, uncle—why do you see him ?"

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Mab nodded, and at once went up to Miss Lavinia with the tidings.

"I can't go, Mab," said Miss Ford, sitting down, "I can't."

"Why not, aunt ?"

"I have taken a horror of railway travelling ever since Mrs. Norton told me that dreadful story about the milkmen."

"The milkmen, aunt ?"

"Yes, milkmen, who had been out for a day's shooting, and they had a bag full of rabbits, and were travelling with Mrs. Norton in the same carriage actually. Well, they got playful, as she called it, and they took the dead rabbits out of the bag, and began throwing them at each other, and across Mrs. Norton, until one of them actually hit her ! Mab, I can't go."

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"I have taken a horror of railway travelling ever since Mrs. Norton told me that dreadful story about the milkmen."

"The milkmen, aunt ?"

"Yes, milkmen, who had been out for a day's shooting, and they had a bag full of rabbits, and were travelling with Mrs. Norton in the same carriage actually. Well, they got playful, as she called it, and they took the dead rabbits out of the bag, and began throwing them at each other, and across Mrs. Norton, until one of them actually hit her ! Mab, I can't go."

"Oh ! aunt, you don't believe that—do you ?"

"My dear, I saw it in the police reports. Besides, we cannot leave the house alone if your uncle is going. Who will take care of it ?"

"Providence and Lucy, aunt. At all events, I shall pack up—do not mind about your trunk, aunt."

But Miss Ford would mind ; she would take her own time, too. Yet even her slowness could create no further delay, and

on a fine July morning the cab was at the door, the trunks were securely strapped on the roof, and the two ladies had only to step in, and drive off to the station.

"Go and enjoy yourself, my darling," said Mr. Ford, who seemed rather excited; "that is better than growing pale over those books of yours, or playing half the night on your harmonium. You have not led a wholesome life of late, Mab; and if Robert was so fond of you as he said, he would never have left you, nor yet taken away the poor boys. They are gone now—all gone!"

"Don't, uncle," entreated Mab.

"You will like the Irish Fords," he resumed, changing the subject; "but where is Livy? Livy, you will be late."

"I can't help it," desperately replied Miss Ford, appearing at the head of the kitchen staircase, in a state of nervous excitement, "there are thieves in this house. I have lost my purse. I had it this morning, and it is gone now; and some one must have taken it."

She entered the parlour, and sat down as she spoke.

"Aunt, we shall be late," said Mab.

"I can't help it," despondently replied Miss Lavinia; "we cannot go. We cannot travel without money, and all my money was in my purse. Get it from the thief—what have I to do with it!"

She looked helpless and desolate.

"Aunt," resolutely said Mab, "you must have the purse; try in your pocket."

But Miss Lavinia shook her head. She was sure the purse was not there.

"Think where you have put it, aunt," persisted Mab, who knew some of her aunt's ways; "try and remember now—was it in the tea-pot, in a stocking, or up the chimney?"

"I—I think it was in a stocking," replied Miss Ford, bewildered at this new view of the question.

"In a stocking," said poor Mab, uttering the indefinite article with something like despair, "then we must unpack the trunk," she resignedly added.

Miss Lavinia's trunk was accordingly taken down from the roof of the cab, opened, and unpacked in the hall; and in a deceitful looking stocking, as neatly folded as if it were innocent of all mischief, the missing purse was found.

"And now you may be off," said Mr. Ford, giving the purse into Mab's keeping, adding emphatically as he did so, "don't let her have it again, Mab, or she will do something else with it."

Then came the final parting—the embraces—the last recommendations, and the cab drove away, and they were gone. Journeys have now kept but one romance, that of speed. The enchantment of old Arab tales and wild northern legends is fulfilled for us. The wonderful carpet, which bore princes through the air—the magic horse, who flew through space—have found their rival in the long black line of railway-carriages, that glance with the speed of lightning through the green landscape.

Rapid, safe, and easy was Mab's journey. England was crossed; the airy mountains of Wales were passed and left behind; Ireland was reached and traversed; and on a wild grey afternoon Mab and Miss Lavinia, after resting a while at a small town on their way, secured a conveyance that was to take them to O'Lally's Town, still a few miles distant. Miss Lavinia's restlessness woke anew. She looked as frightened and uncomfortable as Mab looked gay and secure. The journey, fatiguing though rapid, had not told on her; the light spirit of youth had borne her through it, happy and hopeful, as when she and Miss Lavinia had left Queen Square.

The scenery through which they passed to go to O'Lally's Town, had the wildness and romance that charm the heart of youth. On the one side roared the heavy green waves of the Atlantic; on the other, mountains, silent and stern, rose on a cloudy sky. Now and then steep gaps disclosed valleys of the purest green, with the smoke of a hidden waterfall rising above them, or a herd of cattle browsing on the edge of a rugged precipice; cabins there were few, or none—man had either forsaken or been driven from this wild region.

"I wish we had dear Robert with us!" said Miss Lavinia.

"Aunt," said Mab, after a pause, "you will not forget your promise."

"What promise, my dear?"

"Not to mention my engagement to Robert."

Miss Ford seemed to hesitate.

"Indeed, aunt, you must not mention it," warmly insisted Mab. "Robert has been gone three years, and may not come back for ten. I will not look forsaken or neglected by Robert."

"Very well, my dear—indeed you are quite right. I shall not mention it. Why, this must be the place!"

Day was fading into twilight. After passing through a line of cottages they came up to a large square house, which had quite lost its barn-like look, and which had two lawns in front and a grove of young trees behind. As the carriage drove up

to the house, the door opened and two middle-aged ladies came out, beaming with hospitality. Warm and cordial was their greeting to their guests.

"We did not expect you till to-morrow," said Miss Emily, taking the lead, as usual; "are you tired, Lavinia?"

"No—thank you," hesitatingly answered Miss Ford, conscientiously revolving in her mind how far she was tired or not.

"And you are not tired, I am sure," gaily said Miss Ellen to Mab; "you look too blooming for fatigue."

Her look expressed the admiration youth in its beauty is sure to win; and Mab smiled, and said, very sweetly, that she was not fatigued. They entered the house, and were shown into the sitting-room, where we saw Miss Emily and Miss Ellen three years ago. It was amply furnished now, but it looked almost dark, spite of the glow of two lamps. The wainscotted walls, the leather-covered chairs and sofas, absorbed light and gave back gloom. Formal dignity and no grace characterized this apartment.

"Perhaps you would like to unwrap in here," said Miss Emily, leading them through this room to another much smaller next it.

Miss Lavinia sat down, unfolded a shawl, unpinned a cloak, and unfastened another shawl. Before she had half done Mab's bonnet and travelling cloak were neatly put aside, and she stood before the sisters in her close-fitting black silk and dainty white collar, her golden hair braided back, her clear red and white complexion blooming as health and air could make it, and her soft grey eyes beaming with gentle excitement and good humour. Mab was too attractive and lady-like not to strike the sisters. The simplicity and precision of her attire, the ease of her manners, and the girlish grace of her person, impressed them favourably; yet Mab thought, and she was not mistaken, that uneasiness blended with their evident liking and admiration. They exchanged looks, which meant as plainly as shrewd little Mab could read, "Our brother!"

But "our brother" was in no immediate danger; he was away on business, and was not expected till the next day. Still Mab was confirmed in a suspicion she had already felt; it was Mr. Ford who had asked for, not the Miss Fords who had offered the invitation.

"What a pity there is not a bridge across that nice little river," said Miss Ford, pausing in the unwrapping. "We might have been here much earlier if there had been one."

"A bridge across Shane's river!" exclaimed the two sisters; "You will never see that, Lavinia. Mr. Briggs wanted to have one, but our brother would not allow it."

"I suppose the engineers could not manage it," said Miss Lavinia, looking wise.

The twin sisters knew nothing about that, but their brother would not have a bridge, and so there was an end of it. Miss Lavinia's looks expressed her astonishment.

"And does he then do all that he pleases?" she could not help saying.

It was the turn of the sisters to look surprised.

"Of course he does," replied Miss Ellen, with strong emphasis. "Nothing of a public character is done for miles around without his knowledge or consent. It was he who got the railway branch, in spite of every opposition. But when Mr. Briggs wanted to have the bridge by the sly, our dear brother soon put an end to the matter."

"It is very kind of him to take so much trouble in public business," gravely said Mab; "but how does he find time for it all?"

Miss Emily gave her a searching look; but Miss Ellen, unconscious of lurking irony, replied in her earnest way:

"Our dear brother finds time for everything. It is wonderful even to us. We do not know how he manages it all. Why, to this day we cannot guess how he found out about that bridge, and how he defeated Mr. Briggs—but he did it in twenty-four hours. Some men are born to command, I suppose," she added.

"A formidable power!" said Mab, "and one that must give him his share of enemies."

The two sisters exchanged amazed looks.

"Enemies!" cried Miss Ellen, "why, he is adored. There is not a more popular man in the whole country. As to the servants, I do not exaggerate when I say that they love his little finger better than our whole bodies, and would die for him if need were."

"I am sure they would," said Miss Emily, with perfect composure; "and what is more, I never yet knew man or woman who approached him and could either resist or dislike him. Why, Mr. Briggs himself loves him dearly."

A pretty smile curled Mab's rosy lips, and Miss Lavinia, feeling at a loss what to say, uttered a vague and comprehensive "Indeed!"

Miss Ellen who had slipped out of the room, now put in her

good-tempered face at the door, and uttered the welcome intimation that dinner was waiting.

Miss Emily rose and showed her guests into the dining-room. She took the head of the table and said grace, and the meal, a very plain one, began. Everything, indeed, seemed plain to Mab. The Miss Fords were hospitable and kind, but she was disappointed in them. She found them tame and prosy, and missed the flow of wit and eloquence which she had been prepared to meet in Ireland. Instead of these, she got some statements and opinions that surprised her.

"What a fine view of the sea you must have from that window," remarked Mab, glancing at a large bay window opposite her.

"Oh! no, thank Heaven," emphatically said Miss Emily, shuddering slightly as she spoke.

Mab was too well bred to inquire into the reason of so singular a feeling, but Miss Emily gave it freely.

"We were nearly wrecked when we were girls, Ellen and I, and for years we lived inland, and could not bear to look at water. Our brother has planted trees wherever there is a glimpse of the sea, and though we cannot help hearing it and knowing it is there, we manage never to see it."

Mab supposed they preferred pastoral landscapes; but neither of the sisters expressed any sympathy; the country for them, as Mab indignantly concluded, was fresh air and a farm-yard.

They liked O'Lally's Town, however, and liked both the estate and the name it bore. This led Mab to inquire, in her innocence, if the Irish O'Lallys were related to the French family of Lally Tolendal.

"The French Lally Tolendal family," drily said Miss Emily, "claims to be descended from the Dermot O'Maollalee, whose name has been unfortunately corrupted into O'Lally; but the fact is doubtful; I do not think they have been formally acknowledged. Ellen, my dear, may I trouble you for that fish?—Miss Ford, I insist on your taking more. With regard to those French Lallys, Miss Winter, they are another proof of the different fortunes which await the native Irish at home and abroad. My brother, Mr. O'Lally, lives by his own exertions—a commercial man. Of the vast lands of his ancestors he has not an acre; his birth procures him no distinction, insures him no privilege. The Lally Tolendals of France, on the contrary, from mere soldiers of fortune, rise to the highest distinction."

"One had his head cut off," demurely said Mab.

"Yes, my dear, he had," said Miss Emily, apparently unconscious of satire; "he was beheaded like a gentleman; in his own country he would have been hanged like a felon."

Mab felt answered, and began to think that Miss Emily, at least, was not exactly so tame as she had fancied.

But there was something in Miss Emily's answer which jarred with Mab's pride. She was no one, worse than no one—a foundling. How they must despise her!

"With regard to our brother—" resumed Miss Emily. She did not proceed; the door had opened, Mr. O'Lally himself stood before them.

CHAPTER II.

MAB saw a pale and slight young man, with a massive forehead, dark hair, deep blue eyes, and fine aquiline features. He had the olive complexion and the look of a southern, and his face, though by no means a common one, at once struck Mab as one with which she had long been familiar. Of all this she was conscious in a glance, for, on perceiving their brother, the two sisters had risen with evident joy, and, scarcely summoning presence of mind to perform the ceremony of introduction, they welcomed him with an ardour that surprised Mab, after what proved to be only a week's absence.

"My dear brother! why did you not come half-an-hour earlier?" tenderly said Ellen; and Mab detected, and thought she could read the look with which Mr. O'Lally's sister scanned the dishes on the table. "We have had your favourite fish, too," she added, and she sighed, perhaps because the choicest morsels were gone.

Mab was not mistaken. Miss Ellen did grudge every dainty of which her darling brother had not partaken, and Miss Emily was not behind her in the feeling. Mr. O'Lally was the centre of creation in their eyes, and if they were gentle and generous in all else, they were certainly as hard and as selfish for him as their kind natures allowed them to be. The love which was their cardinal virtue was also their weakness. It began with his name of O'Lally, of which they were far prouder than if they had shared it, and it ended with the minutest of his personal comforts. Yet to all appearance this domestic idolatry had not spoiled Mr. O'Lally. Mab, a keen and amused observer, watched in vain for the irrepressible pettishness of an indulged man. Mr.

O'Lally was polite to her, cordial to her aunt, kind to his sisters, and, what pleased her best, he sat down and ate his dinner without either affected indifference or interest. At the same time, Mab had full opportunity of seeing that the sisters had not deceived her. Mr. O'Lally's power over all who approached him was absolute. He had no need to ask for any thing; he only looked at the servants and they ran and obeyed that silent glance. His sisters themselves did not give him time to express a wish, they eagerly forestalled his every desire; and Mr. O'Lally, though essentially courteous and kind, took all this with the matter of course way of a man who was accustomed to it. But though there was some severity in the fine classical lines of his face, there was no imperiousness; his look was calm, his smile, though rare, remarkably beautiful, his voice was genial and good-humoured; strong indomitable will might be the source of his power in his little world, but it assuredly was a will which knew how to clothe itself in gentleness.

"He fascinates them first," thought Mab, "then he rules them. They all, Mr. Briggs included, I suppose, fear, love, and obey him." These thoughts passed through her mind whilst Mr. O'Lally asked Miss Lavinia how long she had been in Ireland. Miss Lavinia took time to consider the question. Mr. O'Lally relieved her from her perplexity by saying:

"I forgot that you had come straight on from Dublin. You had a long drive along Shane's river."

"It was very wild and lovely," replied Miss Lavinia, anxious to praise something.

"Too wild a great deal," he said, drily. "We pay the cost of that wild landscape. However, if you should favour us with another visit, you will have a shorter drive to O'Lally's Town: for then a stone bridge shall span Shane's river."

"You have decided upon one, then," said Miss Emily.

"Yes. It is to be near the rock, exactly in a straight line between the station and O'Lally's Town."

Mr. O'Lally said this as composedly as though his deciding this question were the simplest thing, and his sisters received the announcement without either wonder or comment; the name of the defeated Mr. Briggs was not even mentioned.

"I see," thought Mab, "O'Lally's Town is to be the capital of this little kingdom, and the bridge must suit him, and after him the world. But where can I have seen him?"

The sound of his voice was strange to her, but that broad forehead, those deeply-set eyes and finely-cut features, seemed

familiar from the days of her infancy. Every time their looks met across the table, that sense of recognition haunted her more and more. She grew nervous under it, and shunned his glance, which still pertinaciously sought her. Indeed Mr. O'Lally looked at Mab with a fixed attention of which he seemed unconscious, and that must have been painful to himself if the severe expression his gaze took, even whilst he talked and jested with her aunt and his sisters, were any clue to his feelings.

"Can we have met?" thought Mab, who was not accustomed to get attention in which neither pleasure nor admiration seemed to blend. But as this did not seem possible, she was searching her memory for the face of which Mr. O'Lally's reminded her, when two visitors, Dr. Flinn and Mr. Briggs, were announced. Mr. O'Lally rose, and there was no mistaking the mischievous triumph of his sparkling eyes as he heard the latter name. His sisters exchanged looks and half smiled, then rising in their turn, ushered their guests into the sitting-room, where two gentlemen were waiting. The good-humoured and open countenance of Dr. Flinn at once prepossessed Mab; with Mr. Briggs, a tall awkward looking man, whose solemn and sullen face betrayed both temper and dullness—she was not charmed. Mr. O'Lally's greeting to both was cordial and courteous. With the most amiable communicativeness, he told them how he had been to the other end of Ireland and back again within the last week; what he had seen and done; nothing, in short, could be more open and free than Mr. O'Lally; but he remained standing, and before five minutes had elapsed, he had managed to fix Dr. Flinn near Mab, whilst he remained at liberty to entertain Mr. Briggs.

Dr. Flinn was a fluent talker, and loved the sound of his own voice. Mab had no other trouble than that of listening to him; for, to do him justice, he seldom required being answered. This suited Mab, who was intent on watching Mr. O'Lally, for hear him well she could not. The room was large, and he and Mr. Briggs sat at some distance from her; fragments of their discourse reached her ear, but their countenances were her real clue to its tenor. Mr. Briggs long sat solemn and sulky; it was plain that Shane's bridge weighed heavily on his mind, an unforgiven wrong; but Mr. O'Lally was all pleasantness and good-humour. He was cheerful and kind, conciliating and seductive. Mab watched him with breathless interest. There was nothing false or perfidious about him, but there was, she felt, a secret subtlety, admirably veiled by a genuine and genial manner.

Once, indeed, she caught a flash in his eye that contradicted the smile on his lips; and that reminded her of a royal leopard in amiable mood, but the resistance of Mr. Briggs was not sufficiently strong to draw forth Mr. O'Lally's wrath. It was wonderful to Mab to watch that gentleman's rigid face thaw gradually under the influence of his fascinating neighbour. The heavy cloud of sullenness vanished from the low stubborn forehead; the obstinate eyes relaxed and twinkled; the long hooked nose itself took a softer expression, and the thin, ill-tempered mouth opened, and actually laughed. This result once attained, Mr. O'Lally, who probably knew the duration of his own spells, rose and joined Dr. Flinn. Mr. Briggs remained alone, but to all appearance perfectly happy.

Amongst Mr. O'Lally's gifts, there was one which gave him infinite credit in Mab's opinion—he could compel Dr. Flinn to listen. The conversation became general, and he took no more than his share in it. That was sufficiently large, indeed, as Mr. Briggs remained absorbed in silent content, sitting apart with half-closed eyes, and occasionally smiling to himself; and Mab, withdrawing to the shelter of her aunt's chair, purposely kept in the background, and never opened her lips.

Unobserved as she thought, the imprudent girl had eyes and ears but for Mr. O'Lally. He was no longer bent on the seduction of Mr. Briggs; he was himself once more, and this, Mab felt sure, was his best as it was his truest aspect. She tried in vain to analyse the secret of the attraction which she felt, without his seeking in the least to waken it. He was handsome, but Mab had seen handsomer men; he talked well, without the trite fluency of Dr. Flinn, and with the vigorous and nervous speech of a man of strong intellectual power; but Mab, little though she had been in society, had met one or two men more brilliant, who said smarter things, and knew better how to say them.

But then Mab had never seen a man who seized on her imagination as did Mr. O'Lally. Of all whom she had known, he alone fulfilled her girlish ideal of a hero. There was something about him, now that he was himself once more, between the severity of a priest and the daring of a soldier; something that moved and charmed her very heart.

Yet unconscious of what was passing within her, fearless of danger, Mab allowed herself to dream on. She never thought that her hour had come, that her pride was going to be humbled, that she had found one who could avenge his predecessors with-

out effort. She only thought that he was like one of Plutarch's captains, or of Froissart's knights—that there was something great, tender, and manly about him—and that to admire him was a feeling new in her experience, and full of sweetness and repose. She had no fear of any sort, for instead of seeking his attention, and courting his regard, she felt inclined to keep aloof, happy to hear and observe him. She little guessed her peril—wise in many things as Mab thought herself, and engaged as she was to Robert Ford, she had no knowledge of the heart—she was still “in maiden meditation fancy free;” and would have rejected, with equal indignation and scorn, the imputation of infidelity, and of love at first sight. That subtle intuition of the mind, temper, and whole being of one who had been a stranger till then, Mab had read and heard of, but never understood. She had not searched into her own conception of this mystery; but had she done so, she would have found that it held much secret contempt for sudden love. For, as Mab said, with the dogmatic sagacity of her years, “True and noble love rests on esteem, and esteem on experience; then how can love at first sight be a great or a worthy feeling?”

Oh! Mab, you are not logical. Esteem does not always rest on experience. Esteem is born of the faith in our own heart, and what matter whether that faith come in years, or in a moment, once it is there?

But, as we said, she did not think of peril—she only felt it pleasant to sit apart and think, and dream, and with a start and little pleasure, she found herself drawn into the conversation by Miss Emily.

“When will you escort Miss Ford and Miss Winter to the caves?” asked that lady of her brother.

“To-morrow, if the weather permits,” he said at once.

“Miss Winter is fond of the sea,” pursued Miss Emily, with a little shiver; “and though I am almost thankful I am getting deaf, so as not to hear its dull roaring noise, we cannot all be of the same taste.”

“You like coast scenery,” said Mr. O’Lally, addressing Mab.

“Very much so—do not you?” she added, after a brief pause.

Their eyes met, he half smiled.

“At times,” he answered.

She looked surprised; he pursued—

“I mean, that when I look at it, I like it well enough; but

one cannot always be looking at that sullen Atlantic which shuts us out from the world."

Mab could not argue the point with him; she could better understand the nervous aversion of the twin sisters than the cool indifference of their brother. Besides, there was that about him which made her wish to keep quietly in the background; and, to do him justice, if Mr. O'Lally caused that wish, he showed no inclination to make her break through it; and never within the whole of her girlish experience had Mab found her attention less courted than by him, never so completely as in Mr. O'Lally had she failed to detect those subtle signs of pleasurable emotion which youth and beauty waken, and which are as familiar to pretty girls as their A B C to little children. For some reason or other, that gentleman gave her as small a share of his notice as courtesy allowed, and for once Miss Lavinia fairly eclipsed her niece.

This unexpected triumph, which greatly disturbed the lady's equanimity, did not last long. As nine struck, the door opened, and a servant-girl appeared on the threshold with a letter in her hand. Mr. O'Lally rose at once, and was going to apologize for leaving the room, when Dr. Flinn, rising too and taking Mr. Briggs's arm, forestalled him.

"We are going," he said—"are we not, Mr. Briggs?"

"To be sure," answered Mr. Briggs, rising slowly.

"Do not forget the caves, Miss Winter," said Dr. Flinn; "think of the caves."

"And ask Mr. O'Lally to show you where Shane's bridge is to be," suggested Mr. Briggs, addressing Mab for the first time; "you will find it worth your while, Miss Winter."

Mab could not help glancing up at Mr. O'Lally; but his calm face betrayed no ironical triumph. He might be too eager to rule, but he was at least content with ruling; he neither felt nor showed contempt for his subjects; he inflicted none of those wounds which vanity never forgives, and he governed with a despot's truest art.

"I am afraid Miss Winter is tired," said Miss Ellen; when the gentlemen had left the room.

Mab roused herself from her reverie and declared that she was not.

"Now I know what you have been thinking of," continued Miss Ellen, nodding at her with more shrewdness than Mab expected from her. "I saw you looking at our brother—every one does so on seeing him for the first time—it is very striking, is it not? Every one says so."

Mab coloured and felt thoroughly confused.

"It is very singular," said Miss Lavinia, "the first time I saw Mr. O'Lally I could not imagine where I had met him—indeed, I could not take my eyes off of him—now, of course, I am used to it."

"But who is it that Mr. O'Lally is so like?" asked Mab.

Miss Ellen smiled and looked up at a print hanging above the mantelshelf. It was taken from a well known picture. A fierce battle scene of wounded and dying, stretched across a narrow bridge, and above that conflict rose a slight young figure, with clear aquiline features, and calmly extended hand of command.

"Bonaparte!" cried Mab.

"Yes, Bonaparte, not Napoleon. Our dear brother is not like the Emperor; but he is very like the first consul and the young general."

It was Miss Emily who spoke, and Miss Ellen nodded.

"And the likeness is not merely external, Miss Winter. Our brother is quite a legislator in his way. He has been the making of this part of the country. There never was such a blessing to this province as when he came to it three years ago—about the time of John's visit."

Mab and Miss Lavinia were startled. They had never heard of that visit.

"I am afraid, too," continued Miss Ellen, "that our brother is rather like General Bonaparte: I am afraid he sets no great value on women—we can't get him to marry."

"How very strange!" said Miss Lavinia, whose eyes were closing with fatigue.

Miss Emily and her sister exchanged looks, and both ladies asked their guests if they would not like to retire. Mab had never felt more wakeful in her life, but Miss Lavinia confessed she was rather sleepy. They were accordingly shown at once to their room on the first-floor of the house. It was a very large room, with two immense square beds in it. The light of the wax-candle seemed lost in the gloom, which extended from the ceiling to the floor. To Mab this apartment seemed strange and dreary; to Miss Lavinia, who was longing to lay her head on her pillow, it was the epitome of human comfort. Both aunt and niece declined to partake of any further refreshment, and Miss Emily having given the heavy damask curtains of the beds a shake, and Miss Ellen having smoothed the dimity cover of the toilet-table, which stood between the two windows, the twin sisters bade their guests a last good-night, and withdrew.

"I always thought the Irish were hospitable," plaintively said Miss Lavinia, as soon as she felt sure the ladies were out of hearing, "but I fear, I really do, that they are not."

Mab looked surprised.

"I think it dreadful, I do," said Miss Lavinia, quite querulously, "to be kept sitting up when I am dying with sleep. True hospitality would have consisted in showing us to our room and letting us go to bed at once. You may laugh, Mab, but I mean what I say."

"But, aunt, that would have seemed rude."

"I do not care for the seeming, but for the reality; and I repeat it, it is dreadful to have to sit and talk when one's eyes are really closing with sleep."

"Dear aunt, they meant well."

"Well, Mab, you are right. I am not just; after all, they could not guess I was sleepy. How do you like them, Mab?"

"They received us very kindly, aunt."

"Of course, but how do you like them?"

"I do not like people at first sight, aunt."

"Well, I confess I do not like that Mr. O'Lally," said Miss Lavinia, lowering her voice, "I think that likeness to Bonaparte quite ominous. You know who Bonaparte was like?"

"Augustus, I believe," dreamily said Mab.

"Yes, I believe he was like Augustus; but he was like some one else too—he was like an Italian condottiere of the sixteenth century, Giovanni of the Black Bands he was called. His portrait was taken by Titian after his death, and is to be seen in one of the galleries in Florence. Ever since Mr. Forbes, who had been a great traveller, and who had seen the picture, told me this, I thought, I really did, that Bonaparte was in some sort born to be either a robber or a conqueror. It was just accident that decided the question; and I think it unfortunate for poor Mr. O'Lally to be like him—do you not think so?"

"Aunt, I always liked Bonaparte, you know."

"Bless me!" cried Miss Lavinia, with a sudden start, "this is Friday!"

"Of course it is; did you not notice that we had a fish dinner?"

"I did not; and we have actually entered O'Lally's Town on a Friday!"

"Never mind, aunt, I feel convinced that Friday shall prove lucky for once."

And whilst Miss Ford lamented, Mab thought of the twin sisters—of their pride in their brother and his ancient name, and felt stung at a remark which had escaped Miss Ellen that evening: "You look quite like an Irish girl, Miss Winter."

"And perhaps I am," thought Mab, bitterly; "who knows what I am?"

CHAPTER III.

ALL bitterness had left Mab's heart by the next morning. What matter even though the worshippers of the O'Lally blood despised what was not even Ford blood, but in their creed no blood at all, they were civil and kind—Mab would ask no more.

Mab was very much assisted in these philosophic reflections by the consciousness that she was some hundred miles away from Queen Square, taking her holiday on the shores of the Atlantic, under new skies and in a strange land. With this feeling blended another, both novel and delightful: a luxurious sense of having nothing to do, nothing to care for—of moving in an entirely new world, and, though Mab knew it not, of seeing Mr. O'Lally daily.

"I shall read him as I would a wonderful book," she thought, indulging herself with a day-dream, whilst her head lay on her pillow and her aunt still slept; "what is there so delightful as to study a vigorous and original character? His is full of contrasts—I could see it last night. His mind is one of the feudal minds. He lives in his own world, his opinions are his own; he is fearless in blame, and what is still more rare, in admiration. I know him as well as if I had lived years with him. He has received three or four strong impressions, they have become a creed, and to which he clings with Celtic tenacity; his country, his religion, his name, his honour, are part of his life and his being. He is gentlemanlike after the fashion of the old heroes of history, by the union of strength, mind, and heart; for he is one of God's great creatures. I like his manner to his sisters—it is tender and manly; he loves them with deep and grateful, but not doting affection. Oh! that Robert were more like him!"

This ungracious thought startled Mab. She tried to check it, and could not do so at once. It returned again and again, and Mr. O'Lally stood between her and Robert, smiling calmly at her confusion. Vexed and ashamed, she got up and ran to the

window—the sight she saw there calmed her at once, and even Mr. O'Lally was forgotten in the dismal prospect before her: the sky was of a dull, heavy grey, unrelieved by a cloud, and rain, close and drizzling, veiled the whole landscape in one dreary mist. Mab looked in vain for the sea beyond the garden, which stretched beneath her window. The garden itself, though probably pleasant in sunshine, looked of the most melancholy green in the rain: the trees hung their dripping boughs above gravelled paths, and flowers, bent or broken, stood in the grass plot in front. In the centre of that plot a pond reflected the grey sky, and, by its small unceasing circles, reckoned faithfully every drop of rain it received.

"This is dreadful!" thought Mab. "Mr. O'Lally will go out, of course, and I shall be at home all day with those prosy twin sisters."

But when Mab went down with her aunt, to breakfast, and saw Miss Emily Ford by daylight, she struck commonplace out of her list of that lady's attributes. She might be narrow and not brilliant, but she was refined and keen—*fine*, as the French say. She seemed, too, to understand at once why, on seeing Mab, Mr. O'Lally's face became suddenly clouded; and she showed some skill in endeavouring to divert Mab's attention from the severe fixedness with which her brother regarded their young guest.

"This is no weather for the caves, Miss Winter," she said to her after breakfast; "but I can promise you something in exchange—you will not be left to the society of two middle-aged spinsters—we expect a young friend, whom you will like, I am sure."

"Is Annie coming in this weather?" asked Mr. O'Lally.

"Annie promised to come, and she never breaks her word."

"You will like Miss Gardiner," said Mr. O'Lally, addressing Mab; "she is an amiable and good-natured girl."

"Good natured!" thought Mab, with rapid intuition, "he does not love her."

"She is a very superior girl," said Miss Emily, pointedly.

"And my partner!" rejoined Mr. O'Lally. "Miss Gardiner shares with me the care and the responsibility of a large manufacturing establishment, Miss Winter. We have no Salic law in this part of Ireland."

"Miss Winter knows how to take that speech," said Miss Emily, who looked half inclined to be vexed. "The truth is, our brother has it all his own way, and Annie—Miss Gardiner, I mean—knows no more about the business than we do."

At another time Mab would have had some saucy speech to put in, but now she felt mute, she knew not why. She could not bear Mr. O'Lally to hear the sound of her voice; she muttered some inarticulate reply, and looked out of the window. She was conscious of appearing shy and foolish, and wished herself far away.

"What does ail me?" she thought, looking at the rain, which still steadily poured down; "what is there in that Mr. O'Lally that I should be afraid to answer him? I never fancied that Bonaparte himself would have frightened me—why should his likeness do so? Is he so very like him, I wonder?"

Thinking him engaged with his sister, she turned round to look at him; but Miss Emily's back was turned to them, and Mr. O'Lally stood within a few paces of Mab, again looking at her intently. Both felt detected, and both reddened, yet for a moment both continued looking. Miss Emily quietly turned round, saw them, and said in her gentle way,

"Ah! what hour do you leave this morning, my dear brother?"

"I shall go presently," replied Mr. O'Lally. He went up to her as he spoke, and Mab at once left the room and went upstairs.

She threw the window open, and put out her burning head in the humid air. She felt very unhappy. The love that comes slowly, and twines itself round the heart day after day, is a sweet and blissful feeling; but violent and stormy, from its very birth, is the passion which, though born in a moment, is doomed to last a lifetime. Mab did not know what ailed her. There are more mysteries in a girl's heart than she herself can fathom, and most mysterious of all is her first love. Faint as the first streaks of morning, it often rises over her whole being, gradually illumining its farthest recesses, and filling them with radiance, life, and joy; but sorrowful from its dawn was Mab's love for Mr. O'Lally. She had a secret and unhappy consciousness that the attraction which drew her towards him, was not returned. She felt ruled and conquered, but she won nothing for her subjection. A painful curiosity seemed to compel his looks to seek hers, but there was neither tenderness nor admiration in that fixed glance.

"I am antipathetic to them all," thought Mab, "but especially to him. He is never more like the stern soldier, or the despotic emperor, than when he looks at me. That Napoleon, of whom we read, who could be gentle, kind, and tender to his

sisters, his friends, and his companions-in-arms, he would never be for me—never. I am to him that something which repels us, and which we all meet in life sooner or later.”

“My dear Mab, you will take your death of cold,” gently said Miss Lavinia, coming in; “why your hair is quite wet! Do shut that window.”

Mab drew in her golden head, which was, indeed, sparkling with dew, but the bright drops on her flushed cheeks had not been left there by the rain. They were the first sad fruit of ill-fated passion.

“I think we had better go down,” continued Miss Lavinia.

Mab could not object. Yet she thought of meeting Mr. O’Lally again with something like fear. To her relief he was gone.

“Miss Gardiner will soon be here,” said Miss Emily. “You will like our dear Annie, Lavinia. She is so good and so handsome. And she is to stay some time too.”

“And she is Mr. O’Lally’s partner, aunt,” said Mab, who had recovered her tongue.

“Yes,” said Ellen, gaily, “and they get on very well together.”

“Then, I suppose they mean——” here Miss Lavinia came to a dead stop, feeling that she was going to make an indiscreet speech; but Miss Ellen, who had understood her quite well, came to her assistance.

“They *ought* to mean, Lavinia; and they are very fond of each other, too, but somehow or other that is all for the present; Emily and I let them alone—they know best, of course, and have a right to take their own time.”

“He does not love her—I am sure he does not,” thought Mab; but she did not ask herself why her heart beat with joy, because Mr. O’Lally, whom she had seen for the first time the evening before, did not love Miss Gardiner, whom she had never seen.

The rain continued to pour steadily the whole day. Mab was beginning to feel and to look disconsolate, when Miss Ellen asked if she would like to see the house. Anything was better than staying quiet, and over the house they went together. Large, heavily-furnished rooms were those at O’Lally’s Town. Only one interested Mab: Mr. O’Lally’s study, on the first-floor. A bookcase held some two or three hundred volumes, and arms, ancient and modern, with plenty of fishing-tackle, testified to Mr. O’Lally’s willingness to mingle other pursuits with those of knowledge.

"You are to take any book you like," said Miss Ellen, reading Mab's eyes, "our brother said so."

Mab expressed her gratitude. Miss Ellen opened the book-case, and nimbly climbing the steps placed near it, for files of newspapers filled the lower shelves, Mab sat on the last step and leisurely examined Mr. O'Lally's library.

She had time to do so, for Miss Ellen was called away, and Mab remained alone.

The volumes which formed Mr. O'Lally's stock of reading were well worn. First of all, came Plutarch's Lives, done in English, an old edition, in five thick volumes; then Shakespeare, next to him Froissart, then Milton, followed by Homer and Virgil, in classical Greek and Latin; Saint Thomas of Aquinas, unabridged; Dante, in Italian; Don Quixote, in Spanish; and Robin Hood's Garland—all copies that had seen fair usage, testified of no mean linguistic acquirements, and of varied tastes. These filled the two higher shelves; the last was devoted to works on Ireland, of the most varied cast.

Though Mab missed the books she would have liked to find—the gentle modern literature with which she was familiar—she had judgment enough to feel that the mind which could rest content with food so solid, must be one of no common power—Plutarch's heroes, Shakespeare's men and women, Froissart's knights, and Milton's angels, were goodly company for any one. Yet, passing all these by, she fixed her choice on one of the Irish volumes beneath. It proved to be a manuscript translation of the sorrows of the children of Lir—a wild and beautiful tale, which charmed Mab. She read how the beautiful daughter of Lir and her brothers were metamorphosed into swans; how they all marvelled at the first sound of the Christian bell; how they lived with the holy man, and stood at each corner of the altar whilst he said mass; and she was just going to reach the catastrophe, which makes this one of the three sorrowful tales of Irish literature, when Miss Lavinia appeared, and summoned her away.

Miss Gardiner had arrived, and the twin sisters were anxious to introduce her to Mab.

"Indeed, they care very little about it," thought Mab; but she put her book away, and followed her aunt downstairs.

When Mab entered the sitting-room with her aunt, she found the three ladies waiting for her. The Miss Fords were sitting near the table, and Miss Gardiner stood in one of the windows. She turned round on hearing the door open, and, as the light fell

full on her face, Mab saw her well. Miss Gardiner was twenty-three or twenty-four years old now. She had clear, regular features, and fine dark eyes—eyes both dark and deep, but Mab did not like their look. Nor did she like the expression of her mouth. It was delicate and well-formed, but it had a cold, disdainful curve, which her smile, remarkably sweet and winning, vainly contradicted.

"She is handsomer, far handsomer, than I am," thought Mab, with a keen sense of pain; "but I do not like her."

She tried to check the feeling, and tried in vain—it returned even whilst Miss Gardiner, advancing towards her with her pleasant smile, said prettily enough,

"I need not tell you how anxious I was to make your acquaintance, Miss Winter; for I drove ten miles through this rain on purpose to see you to-day."

"I always heard the Irish were hospitable," replied Mab, a little stiffly, "but I scarcely expected to receive so speedy a proof of it."

"We are more than hospitable," said Miss Gardiner, "we are inquisitive, and fond of strangers. Now, you have lived your whole life in a city—a large one—one of the largest in the world. A stranger to you is an object of mistrust, scarcely, at least, one of interest; but think of me, Miss Winter—twenty miles is the full extent of my peregrinations, and a town of six thousand souls the full amount of my city experience. I have known the same people since I was born, and have known none other."

"Am I your first stranger?" asked Mab, rather amused.

"No, you are my third. The first was an Italian gentleman, who soon left us; the second, an English lady, who had married an Irishman, and who, unfortunately, went away; and you are the third, and allow me to be selfish, and to hope that you will remain."

"And marry an Irishman," put in Miss Ellen, knowingly.

"Why not?" asked Miss Gardiner, looking round at her. "Miss Winter might go farther and fare worse."

The only Irishman Mab could think of was Mr. O'Lally, and her face burned in a moment. With a beating heart, she thought,

"Oh! how happy his wife will be!" and for a moment, too, she had a rapid though imperfect revelation of her own feelings; but Mab was proud, and pride is blind; so this passing conscious-

ness was not heeded, though it left its trace in the growing dislike with which she regarded Miss Gardiner.

In vain the partner of Mr. O'Lally laid herself out to please the guest of his sisters, Mab herself felt that she was cold; but there was, apart from her secret and unacknowledged jealousy, something in Miss Gardiner she did not like. She talked with seeming openness, yet, in reality and after more than an hour's conversation, Mab found that the handsome and, apparently, frank Annie, had given her no key to her real nature. On herself, her feelings, tastes, and habits, Miss Gardiner was wholly silent. Such a person as Annie Gardiner did not seem to exist for her.

"I suppose that is good taste," thought Mab, who knew she was rather prone to being communicative about herself, "but it is chilling, and I do not like it."

Yet, truth compelled her to acknowledge internally that there was nothing cold about her companion; far from it—her manner was not merely cordial, it was also kind.

"She must have a secret, then," was Mab's conclusion. And, perhaps, she was right. Miss Gardiner, cheerful though she tried to seem, had the look of one on whose mind lies the weight of some secret care.

Mab, who was given to hasty conclusions, and whose active mind idleness, the dull day, the rain, and her own growing feelings, rendered doubly quick, at first made sure that Miss Gardiner was secretly pining for her handsome partner, and that this unreturned affection it was which preyed on her mind.

But closer observation altered her opinion. In the first place, the twin sisters, who were anything but reserved women, winked and nodded so much when Mr. O'Lally was mentioned, that it seemed useless for Miss Gardiner to let a thoroughly understood and approved preference trouble her. This matter, at least, was open enough. In the second instance, not merely did she show no more emotion on such occasions than a smile and a blush could convey, but it was precisely when the discourse was most remote from him, and touched on very different topics, that, to Mab's observant gaze, she grew alarmed and watchful, though why she should be so, it was very hard to say.

The day was well nigh worn, Miss Emily had vanished, intent on some household concern, when Miss Ellen casually said, in allusion to some matter under debate:

"It was in the time of the O'Flahertys. You remember them, Annie?"

Annie gave a little nervous start, but said quietly enough,

"You forget I never knew them."

"I always do forget it—all owing to that dream of mine. You must know, Lavinia, that I always have most curious dreams, and just before the O'Flahertys went to America I had the most extraordinary dream. You remember I told you of it next day, Annie."

"Yes, I remember," said Miss Gardiner, in a low voice; and she went to the window to thread her needle.

"You must know," continued Miss Ellen, "that I dreamt I was in a great wide waving plain, like an American prairie, and there were the O'Flahertys before me in a log-house, and Mary O'Flaherty, with her pretty yellow hair, laughing at me from the door-step. To say the truth, Miss Winter, Mary was very like you. That is why your face struck me as so familiar and so Irish, I suppose."

Mab smiled, and saw Miss Gardiner give another start, and look up hurriedly at her; then, feeling herself detected, drop her eyes again, whilst her pale cheek flushed.

"Well, that is not all," resumed Miss Ellen; "I had scarcely had time to see Mary, when I saw some one, a woman it seemed, with her back to me and her face to Mary, approach and embrace her"—here Miss Gardiner quietly left the room—"and as she did so, Mary turned pale and paler again, and at length she faded and shrank away into a little heap of dust; then the woman turned round, and who should it be but our own dear Annie there. Why, where is she?"

"Miss Gardiner has left the room," said Mab.

"Just like me," exclaimed Miss Ellen, with a sort of desperate resignation. "I know she cannot bear to hear that dream, and I must needs tell it when she is by."

"What a very remarkable dream," said Miss Lavinia, who was a dreamer herself, and held all sleeping revelations in mysterious awe.

"Yes, but it was very thoughtless of me to say a word of it opposite Annie. She was in the house when I dreamt it, and when I told it her the next morning she went into a dead swoon at the breakfast-table."

"I daresay she was much attached to Miss O'Flaherty."

"Oh! no—she had never seen her."

"Are you sure?" asked Miss Lavinia.

"Quite certain," answered Miss Ellen, with a little surprise.

"Annie was in deep mourning when the O'Flahertys came to this part of the country, and she saw no one until after they had gone to America."

"Perhaps they met," suggested Miss Lavinia.

Miss Ellen shook her head.

"Mary never saw her," she said; "and she never ceased wishing she could have seen 'that pretty Annie of yours,' as she called her."

"Well, then, depend upon it, they are to meet some day," sagaciously said Miss Lavinia. "I am sure of it, after such a dream as that."

"On the day of judgment, then," replied Miss Ellen, with much emotion; "for six months after I dreamed of their meeting, Mary O'Flaherty died in America."

"How very singular!" exclaimed Miss Lavinia, much startled. "What does Mr. O'Lally think about it?" she asked, after a while.

"I never told him of it," hesitatingly replied Miss Ellen; "he did not like the O'Flahertys, and will never hear their names mentioned."

"He knew her—he loved her," thought Mab, with rapid intuition, "and that is why he looks so at me. And I am like her, am I?"

There was a deep old mirror opposite to her; she raised her eyes to it, and studied her own image in it.

"So I am like the girl he loved," she thought again, and there was pleasure and pain in the reflection.

"And what is all that to you?" asked Pride, wakening in alarm.

From the mirror Mab looked back to the window. The rain had ceased, the sky had cleared, and the garden path, which stretched beneath her view, looked practicable. Mab's resolve was taken at once. Silent and decisive in all she did, she stole out of the room, went up-stairs, returned attired for a walk, and, slipping out of the house unperceived, found herself in the garden.

CHAPTER IV.

THE great change which had taken place at O'Lally's Town had extended to the garden attached to the dwelling-house. The trees were young still, but they were beautifully grouped; the lawn had lovely undulating lines, the flowers were brilliant and varied, and a little river, which fed the pond in front of the house, added to the quiet beauty of the place. It was more of a

park than a garden in its main features, though too limited in extent to be called such; but Mab found it a lovely place, and thought that with sunshine and blue sky it must be enchanting, since even on this gray day it was so beautiful.

Walking straight on, she soon reached a broad iron gate, and through its bars she saw an exquisite view of the surrounding country; but this was not what Mab wanted. She retraced her steps, and at length found a low wooden door in the wall, beyond which she heard the hollow moaning of the sea. It was fastened, but the key was in the lock; and Mab, on opening it, found herself on the shore. The rain had ceased completely, the wind was still, and heavy clouds rolled gloomily away from the stormy sky.

A wild and dreary landscape lay before her, but one that enchanted her, for she remembered none, and had not even imagined any like it. On her left rose purple mountains, a seemingly impenetrable barrier between her and the green landscape, that lay beyond them. From their base stretched a long brown sweep of plain and endless waste, seeming to skirt for ever the rocky coast. Below this the green and heavy waves of the Atlantic retreated to a white line of horizon—that was all, but it was much, for it was infinite and solitude.

The shore was silent and lonely. Mab made her way through the rocks, and stepped down to the water's edge, and walked on in what was literally to her a fever of delight. She had seen the sea at Brighton with sunshine and blue sky; a pretty tame sea it had seemed—a sea for pebbles and shells. This, with its mountains and wild rocks, with its stormy waves and sullen-looking clouds, was another ocean, grand, impressive, and sublime. At length Mab stopped; she had reached a semicircle in the shore, and in the wall of rock that enclosed it, she saw a row of caves and grottoes, sea halls fit for the gods of old, and which the wild spray washed daily.

Mab entered that which was nearest to her; it was also the largest, and she remained breathless at the sight of its loveliness. It was lofty and wide, and filled with a pale green light. All was green around her, from the shallow pool on the sandy floor below to the high rocks of the roof above. Every drop of water was a liquid emerald; it was in green air that she moved, and from the upper end of the cavern issued a stream of green rays, full of softness and beauty. A narrow path wound round the walls of the cave, vanishing in the roof. Did it lead to the source of this mysterious and palpable light? Mab was not

timid, and the path looked safe. She climbed up nimbly, and in a few minutes started to catch a glimpse of cloud and sky. She had reached the end of the path, and with it an opening in the roof, which rocky projections concealed from below.

This opening was beyond her reach, else Mab would have amused herself with looking out, and taking a comprehensive view of sea and shore; but the platform on which she stood afforded a convenient seat, and there she rested and entertained herself with looking alternately down at the cave, which from this spot had lost its green beauty, and up at the grey sky above.

"Not a week ago, in Queen Square, looking at the poplar tree in our garden, and here to-day," thought Mab; "the tameness of civilization, and the wildness of nature. Oh! if life could be made up so. If it could be one endless and beautiful change, instead of that weary, dreary, monotony of day creeping after day."

She looked at the little lake of sea-water below her; then she scanned the rocky edge of the opening in the roof. It was skirted with withered verdure, pale, thin blades of grass, that grew half in and half out, whilst in the air above the gorse vigorously faced the sea breeze. Mab liked this new view of the sky, which met her upturned gaze. Long did she look into the spacious field of grey, which gradually melted into pure azure blue, flecked with clouds as light as the white sea foam. Where did they come from?—where were they sailing away? Aerial travellers, that looked so free and careless, had they a bourn of their own, known to themselves—a goal in some far land? Was there an end to their wanderings?—or, like the accursed man of yore, were they doomed to eternal restlessness? One especially, that long stood still in the zenith, claimed Mab's attention. It was so clear and transparent, that through it she saw the sky—so defined and graceful in form, rosy with the flush of sunset, that it seemed to have a being of its own. Vain thought! the wind rose, the cloud struggled awhile, then tore asunder; one half drifted away, wrecked on that blue ocean, the other melted like a thin breath, and soon had vanished utterly from Mab's wistful look.

"They say 'woman is fickle as water,'" thought Mab; "but water itself is not so fickle as a cloud."

She looked down and started. She was not dreaming surely! That water below her was no longer still; it was flowing, and surely it was higher and fuller! Was this the tide? She was at the bottom of the cave in a moment. Where was the beach along which she had entered?—gone!—gone for ever beneath

the swollen waves, that came rushing into the cave, dashing their white spray on its walls of rock !

Mab was constitutionally brave ; but death is appalling. Here was no danger against which to strive, but a fatal end to submit to.

She shrank from the pitiless waves, that rose higher and higher every moment, and giving one long look of despair at the broad and endless ocean before her, she returned to the little platform above, and sat down. She made no effort to escape by that opening. She knew well enough that it would be vain ; the rock was steep, and smooth as glass, and far beyond her height. No—there was nothing for it but to sit and listen to death coming nearer and nearer, with an even step and a hollow sound.

In one moment, rapid, though terrible, Mab's past and present came before her. Her twenty years of life, Mr. Ford, his sister, Robert's love, Mr. O'Lally's pale face, all blended together. Then came gleams of hope, then utter despair—she was so young, life was so sweet. Had they missed her ?—were they seeking for her ?—were those their voices, or the whistle of the wind, and the cry of some sea-bird ? She listened—all was still—and to-morrow, at that hour, all would be over. She saw them—Miss Lavinia crying upstairs in her room ; the twin sisters busy below ; and their brother talking to Annie in his pleasant voice and with his kindly eye.

And where was she, meanwhile ? Lying dead and cold beneath the green waves, floating adrift to the endless wastes of ocean, the prey of strange creatures ! The mere thought made her shudder, and filled her with rebellious horror. She looked despairingly at that sky above her, so pitiless, with its white stars coming out of solemn blue depths ; she heard the approach of that water which came creeping up to her, and, in her anguish, she uttered a long wild cry for help.

It was answered ; but not by a human voice. Within her Mab heard the answer to that call for aid. She suddenly remembered that she had noticed growing in a cleft of the rock, below the spot where she was sitting, a frail yellow flower, in bloom. If it could grow and blossom there she was safe, for it was sure proof that the waves would not reach her. With a sigh of the deepest relief Mab now contemplated waiting until help would come, and even spending the night where she was.

"I shall have an adventure to tell uncle, and to write to Robert," she thought, almost gaily ; for what would have been dread-

ful, had it come first, was almost entertaining after the short though terrible fears she had passed through.

The adventure, moreover, lost all its heroic proportions as time passed, for not merely did it seem to Mab that the sound of the water below her was retreating, but she felt certain that she heard distant shouts on the shore above. She listened intently, the shouts came nearer; she raised her voice and answered them; steps and voices approached; presently the light of a lantern flashed across the hole of her prison, and Mab heard Miss Emily saying anxiously,

"Miss Winter—are you safe?"

"I am."

"Thank God! Michael—you must help her out."

"Give me your hand, Miss," said Michael's voice in the darkness.

Mab obeyed.

"And now the other hand."

She gave him that too. With a strong grasp Michael lifted her out, and Mab stood safe, though trembling on the cliff.

"Thank God!" cried Miss Emily, bursting into tears; "my brother would never have forgiven me."

"There was no danger, ma'am," coolly said Michael, "the water never comes up to the top of the cave."

But Miss Emily was too much agitated to take this consolatory view of the matter. Her hysterical sobs increased and alarmed Mab. She forgot both her recent danger and deliverance, and endeavoured, but in vain, to soothe Miss Emily.

"She would come out," muttered Michael, "and she is so frightened of the sea."

"Pray do go in," urged Mab, and she attempted to take her hand.

But Miss Emily uttered a piercing scream, and, pushing her away, sank back in a fainting fit.

"I shall carry her in, Miss, if you will hold the lantern," said the man, lifting up his mistress.

Mab did as she was bid; they were nearer the house than she thought, and, passing through the garden, they reached it in a few minutes. It was alive with lights; Miss Ellen and Miss Lavinia had just returned from a search in another direction; Mab heard their anxious voices, and above them the quick, startled tones of Mr. O'Lally.

"Emmy—where is Emmy? Why did you let Emily go out?"

He came out into the garden as he spoke. Before Mab could come forward and address him, he had seen his sister in Michael's arms. He sprang forward to her, exclaiming,

"What is it?—what has happened?"

"Miss Emily got frightened about the young lady, and would go and look for her, and she has fainted."

Without a word, Mr. O'Lally seized his sister and carried her into the dining-room. On seeing Emily's pale face, Miss Ellen became violently agitated; Mr. O'Lally looked at Miss Gardiner, and, obeying the glance, she led his sister out of the room.

"I knew something dreadful would happen," said Miss Lavinia, looking at Mab piteously.

"God help me!" replied Mab, "I have done it all."

Miss Emily still lay in her brother's arms. She was rigid and pale, her eyes were half open, and her hands were clenched. Honour, one of the servants, knelt on the floor vainly attempting to revive her. At length some slight symptoms of life appeared on her pale face.

"Emily, my darling—Emily, how are you?" whispered Mr. O'Lally.

Miss Emily looked at him vacantly, sat up, stared and sighed. He spoke again, but she shook her head and shuddered.

"Emily," he urged, "are you hurt? What is it?"

"The sea," she said, shivering—"the sea, and the sea birds."

Mr. O'Lally hastily felt her pulse—it was burning and throbbled wildly. Hints of caution against all excitement or all violent emotion which their medical man, Dr. Flinn, had given him with regard to his two sisters, recurred to him now. The fright had been too great for a mind never very strong.

"Get her room ready," said he to Honour, "quick, I say!" he added, stamping his foot with a vehemence which frightened Mab. "She is ill—very ill—I will carry her up-stairs and ride off for Dr. Flinn."

To hear Mr. O'Lally was to obey at O'Lally's Town. Honour did as she was bid, and Mr. O'Lally, taking his sister in his arms, carried her up-stairs, silently followed by Mab. When he had laid Miss Emily on her bed, Mab went up to him and said impressively,

"You may trust Miss Ford to me, sir."

"You will not leave her till I come back?"

"I will not."

Her pale face, her resolute tone struck him. "Very well,"

was all he said, and, turning away, he hastily strode down-stairs. In a few minutes Mab heard his horse galloping away along the beach.

Mr. O'Lally had placed his sister on her bed, but she had to be undressed; this Mab and the servant girl proceeded to do; she offered them no resistance, though she still spoke unconnectedly. Mab was much affected, but remained calm.

Honour, an orphan girl, whom the twin sisters had sheltered and received in the hour of need, wept bitterly.

"It will be the death of Miss Nelly," she said, "it will be her death. Miss Nelly cannot bear to see her sister's little finger hurt, and to see and hear her so will be the death of her."

"I hope not," exclaimed Mab; "pray do not speak so. It will be nothing; depend upon it—it will be nothing."

"It was to be," said Honour, with a solemn shake of the head; "it was to be, Miss, and it has been coming on. Miss Emmy was flighty for the last week. The master thought it was her spirits were up, but she was flighty, and to-night's fright finished it."

"For God's sake, say no more!" said Mab, almost piteously.

Honour saw how remorse stung her, and being, like the ignorant of most nations, a strict though unconscious predestinarian, she administered comfort after her own fashion.

"The Lord in heaven bless you, Miss," she said, kindly, "*you* had no hand in it. You are as innocent as the babe unborn. It was to be, Miss."

Mab shook her head, but would not pursue the argument; and Honour, who was not of a loquacious turn, held her peace.

Both were sitting near the bed of the suffering lady, Mab at the head, Honour at the foot; between them stood a little table, on which burned the unsnuffed candle, which Honour had brought up from the kitchen. It lit dimly the whole of the large room. Mab had eaten little or nothing since the morning; and though she was too much agitated to feel hunger, she was faint and dizzy with her long fasting. The room seemed to her feverish gaze to swell to a preternatural size; the ceiling rose, the walls expanded, the very curtains extended to solemn and pall-like vastness. She tried to shake off the delusion; and without venturing to look at the bed, she gazed steadily at Honour's good-natured but common-place features. Here she saw no change, for imagination had no hold. The low brow, the dull eyes, the heavy mouth, were the same she already knew, though disfigured and swollen by tears that still trickled down the ruddy cheeks. But the sight

of the woe she had caused was more than Mab could bear. She closed her eyes, and hid them with her hand. Then her hearing became acutely sensitive. She could distinguish Miss Ellen's hysterical laughter rising from below, spite the closed doors of the sitting-room; and in the vague murmur that accompanied that dismal sound, imagination made her fancy that she caught Miss Gardiner's gentle tones and her aunt Lavinia's hesitating voice. She knew it could not be, yet the more she repelled the fancy, the stronger it grew, until words and fragments of discourse sounded distinct and clear in the old house.

"Better look than listen," thought Mab. She removed her hand, glanced at Honour, who was devoutly saying her beads, and from her turned resolutely to Miss Emily Ford. The sick lady's eyes were half closed; she looked asleep. Honour nodded, as much as to say that she was sleeping, but did not speak.

The house was very silent now—silent as death, and both Mab and the servant felt that strange stillness oppressive.

"Master is not coming back," whispered Honour, looking uneasy.

Mab looked as if she felt anxious, but did not answer.

"I wonder how is Miss Nelly?" whispered Honour, after another silence.

"You can go and see, if you like," replied Mab.

The girl hesitated.

"You had better go, Miss," she said; "it will rest you, and I dare not leave you alone."

"No—no. I will not go—I am not afraid—besides, I promised Mr. O'Lally I would not leave his sister."

Honour hesitated again, but at length softly saying she would not be a minute, she stole down stairs, leaving the door open.

The room was chill; a keen sea-breeze had arisen, and Mab shivered. She felt dizzy too, and was sinking with weakness. A sense of misery woke within her, and with it confused memories. A few hours ago she was in the cave, facing what seemed certain death; and now the evil fate had passed from her and rested on an innocent head; and either seemed a dreadful nightmare, full of wild and dreary images.

"Is she gone?" whispered a voice, whose hot breath fanned her neck.

Mab turned round, started, and met Miss Emily's glittering eyes full upon her.

"I see she is gone," resumed Miss Ford; "and now, Annie, I can speak to you. Annie, Mary O'Flaherty is *not* dead;

she came last night—but he shall marry you, Annie. She is a beggar, and you, Annie, will make a great man—a real O’Lally of him yet.”

Mab was too much amazed and frightened at this address to utter one word of soothing. Time to do so was not given her, for, starting out of bed, Miss Emily clasped Mab in her arms, and renewed her vehement and incoherent words of endearment. In vain the sense of her danger rushed to the young girl’s mind: escape was out of the question—she was held in a firm grasp, and to raise an alarm was perilous; for the wild fondness of Miss Emily looked ready to break out into fierceness.

Trembling with terror, yet mistress of herself, Mab said softly:

“Go back to bed and tell me all about it. He is a real O’Lally, is he not?”

“Hush! Ellen must not know,” mysteriously replied Miss Emily. “She thinks that Mary is dead. But she is not dead. Oh! I knew her at once—and so did he; did you see how he looked at her? Annie, I am afraid he loves her still.”

“No—no, he does not,” said Mab, not knowing in her fear what she said.

“I tell you he does!” angrily rejoined Miss Emily; “he could not take his eyes off of her last night and this morning. He said you were handsomer, but that was to deceive us. He always did like fair women best, and she is handsomer now than before she died—far handsomer, Annie.”

“So you think he likes her?” said Mab, trying to smile and seem calm.

“I am sure he does; but speak low—she is listening at the door. We shall go and lock it, Annie dear, we shall lock ourselves in.”

And still holding Mab in her embrace, Miss Emily attempted to drag her to the door, for the purpose of locking it. Had Mab’s hands been free, she would have had self-possession enough not to resist; but they were pinned to her sides, and the sense of her helplessness rendered doubly terrible the prospect of being locked up with the delirious Miss Ford. The silence of the house, the height of the staircase, precluded all hope of speedy assistance. It was useless to scream, and she did not; but she resisted with all her might.

“Ah! pussy,” said the mad woman—for she was mad then, and she spoke with a playfulness that was frightful to the poor girl—“ah! pussy, you must—you must!”

In spite of Mab’s desperate resistance, the door was reached.

Holding her fast with one frail arm, now turned into steel by the strength of fever, Miss Emily stretched out the other and turned the key in the lock.

"Ah! pussy," she said laughing, "you are caught, pussy—you are caught!"

It was then that Mab heard steps and voices in the hall below, and uttered a piercing cry for help. Miss Emily's hand attempted to stifle it on her lips; but it had been heard—a man's step rushed up quickly, followed by another; the door was burst open. Mr. O'Lally entered and took hold of his sister, whilst Doctor Flinn, stepping round behind her, held her fast. Miss Emily did not resist, and she quietly released Mab, who, still shivering with horror, sank on a chair.

CHAPTER V.

"You need not hold me so tight, Doctor Flinn," composedly said Miss Emily. "I know you think me mad, but you are mistaken."

"Mad? not a bit of it!" said Doctor Flinn; "but you are excited, and so you frightened the young lady. I think you you will be best in bed, Miss Emily."

"I think so too, and therefore I shall thank you and my brother to leave the room, Doctor Flinn."

Miss Emily spoke in tones of ice, and Doctor Flinn said soothingly:

"To be sure; and here is Honour. Honour, help your mistress to bed. Mr. O'Lally, Miss Winter, let us leave Miss Emily."

Mab rose mechanically and went out followed by Mr. O'Lally and Doctor Flinn. They did not go down the staircase, but stood on the broad landing; a candle which Honour had brought up, and which she had placed on the side board near the door, gave them light.

"And now, my dear young lady," said Dr. Flinn, fastening a keen look on Mab's face, "will you just tell us what passed?"

"Miss Emily spoke strangely and wanted to lock the door," replied Mab hesitatingly.

"Oh! she spoke strangely: and pray what did she say?"

Mr. O'Lally saw Mab start nervously as Dr. Flinn put the question, and her face burned, and her eyelids fell. She said at length,

"I believe there was some confusion in Miss Emily's mind concerning my identity. She spoke to me as if I were Miss Gardiner, and spoke of me as if I had been another person, like whom, it seems, I am."

"Any one can see that," remarked Doctor Flinn emphatically.

Mr. O'Lally did not appear to have understood Mab, and said anxiously,

"Well, Doctor Flinn, what do you think of that? Is it brain fever?"

"No, it is nervousness, no more.

"Thank God!"

Doctor Flinn shook his head.

"It is nervousness," he said again, "but another such attack, and Miss Emily's mind is gone for ever."

Mab looked at him: his brow knit, his lips tightened, but he showed no other signs of emotion.

"You know what I told you long ago," pursued Doctor Flinn; "two better women than your sisters do not exist, but their father died mad, and they are weak-minded. Miss Emily, the keener of the two, is most in peril—Miss Ellen's good-humour will carry her through, I hope."

Mr. O'Lally drew a deep breath.

"My poor sisters!" he said.

And in the tone in which he uttered the words, Mab read the story of his deep tenderness. Their very weakness and infirmity had twined them for ever round his heart-strings.

"Do you think the fit is over?" he asked, after a while. "She knew us, you see."

"That is not the question—is the confusion in her mind which this young lady caused over?"

Mr. O'Lally looked at Mab, and she said eagerly, yet scarcely repressing a shudder as she made the offer:

"Shall I go in?"

"Not now," replied Doctor Flinn, "but an hour hence it may not be amiss."

"I shall come in an hour," said Mab; and, leaving the two gentlemen on the landing, she went down-stairs to her aunt's room. She found Miss Lavinia sitting on a chair in a state of complete distress. She was more than distressed, she was thoroughly bewildered. She saw that Mab was scarcely equal to explanation or comment, and though she felt much perplexity con-

cerning the real causes of this series of mishaps, exclamations rather than questions showed her feelings.

"Those dreadful caves!" she said, "I am sure I shall have a horror of caves."

Mab made no answer; she was sitting on a chair, thinking of Doctor Flinn's ominous predictions, of the terrible evil she had caused, and with her eyes fixed before her, and her hands clasped on her knees, she looked a picture of dejection. Her woe-begone face struck her aunt.

"My dear child!" she said tenderly, "do bear it better."

"Aunt, it is dreadful!" replied Mab.

She threw herself, ready dressed, on her bed, and lay there with closed eyes. Miss Lavinia walked restlessly up and down the room, then sat down, then got up again, and finally went to bed, and, fatigue prevailing over agitation, she fell fast asleep.

Mab then sat up in her bed, smoothed her loosened hair, and softly got up. Walking on tiptoe, she left the room and glided up-stairs to that of Miss Emily. A ray of light stole out through the half-open door on the gloom of the landing; everything seemed quiet within. Mab gently pushed the door open. Mr. O'Lally was watching alone by Miss Emily's bed.

"I have come," whispered Mab. "Is it time?"

Before he could answer, the door, which Mab had half closed, again opened, and Miss Gardiner entered, and, softly stealing round to Mr. O'Lally's chair, whispered that his sister Ellen wanted him.

He looked at Emily, who lay calm enough to all appearance, and with her eyes closed, at Miss Gardiner, and at Mab, and, feeling that they could remain without him for a few minutes, he left the room.

"How is Miss Ellen?" asked Mab, softly.

"Better; but Doctor Flinn says she must not see her sister, and we find it hard to keep her away."

"And I have done all this," said poor Mab, with despair.

"Annie, dear Annie," called Miss Emily, in a low tone, "come to me, Annie."

Miss Gardiner went up to the bed, but the sick woman gave her a stern look.

"I said Annie, not you."

"Well, and am I not Annie?"

"Not you—you are Mary O'Flaherty."

Annie turned pale as death, but Miss Emily only nodded at her.

"I knew you at once," she said, "at once. When you came the other night I told Ellen so. I want Annie, and there is Annie," she added, catching sight of Mab, and immediately stretching out her hand and taking hold of the young girl's arm.

"She takes you for me," said Miss Gardiner, endeavouring to rally.

"And she takes me for Mary O'Flaherty," said Mab, looking at her.

But Annie Gardiner's face remained rigid and cold.

"Perhaps you look like her," she said, at length. "I never saw her."

"Yes, you did," said Miss Emily, half angrily; "I showed you Annie's likeness, and you said you did not like her—that she had a false face; and from that moment, Mary O'Flaherty, I disliked you—but you are dead, thank God, dead and gone—only don't get alive again—do not—that is all I ask of you."

"Poor thing!" sadly said Miss Gardiner, "how she wanders!"

Mab thought there was strange method in all Miss Emily's wanderings; but she kept her thoughts to herself. She still stood by the bed, her hand clasped in the sick lady's, and Miss Gardiner, though out of sight, was still near Miss Emily's pillow, when the door gently opened, and Mr. O'Lally came in. Before he could speak, his sister exclaimed ardently,

"There he is, Annie—she shall not have him. We will have no grey-eyed, no yellow-haired Marys here."

The two girls had not expected this, and stood confounded. Mr. O'Lally, taken by surprise, looked from one to the other; Annie had turned pale, and averted her eyes from his; Mab bent her blushing face on her bosom. Spite of himself, his look lingered on her; never had he seen so graceful an image of wounded maiden pride as now stood there before him.

But, quickly recovering his self-possession, he went to his sister, and, bending over her, he attempted to soothe her. Annie, after remaining mute and motionless for a few seconds, stole out of the room, closing the door after her. Mab would gladly have followed her, but could not—Miss Emily still held her hand firmly clasped.

"My poor sister is still delirious," said Mr. O'Lally; "she still takes you for Miss O'Flaherty—and—," he added, raising his eyes to Mab's face, "you are wonderfully like her."

"He loved her," thought Mab, unconsciously jealous of that dead mistress.

Tired with standing, she tried to release her hand from Miss Emily's grasp, but she was held fast. Mr. O'Lally at once endeavoured to assist her, but his sister's slender fingers seemed of iron, and her imploring words,

"Don't take away Annie," made him hesitate.

"Do not," said Mab, "she will soon let me go of her own accord."

"If you will be so good as to wait, it may be best," he replied with a grateful look.

Mab knelt on the rug, and gently whispering to Miss Emily, attempted to coax her into giving her her liberty; but Miss Emily only answered her with a ghastly smile, and a "No—no, pussy," that reminded Mab of the evening's adventure, and made her shiver. She could not help looking at Mr. O'Lally—he stood within a few paces of her, unconscious of her fears, but a security against all danger.

"You will get faint and tired so," he said anxiously.

"Ah! do not think of me," replied Mab, looking up; "I am the cause of all this."

Mr. O'Lally stood with his left arm resting on the head of his sister's bed. He bent to hear Mab, who knelt before him, and spoke low. Her up-raised face, on which the light fell full, shone clear and bright on the dark background of the room. Something in those soft grey eyes, in that sad, though sweet, smile, seemed to smite him, for he started back, like a man who receives a blow he cannot ward. The cloud again came to his face; he rang the bell, Honour appeared in a few minutes, and, motioning her to attend to Mab and his sister, Mr. O'Lally went to the window, and stayed there looking out at the dark night.

He came no more to look at Mab; it was best not, no doubt; and thus the night wore, and grey dawn streaked the eastern sky. He looked round, Honour stood by him.

"Miss Emmy's sleeping, sir," she whispered, "and the young lady too."

She glanced towards Mab, and Mr. O'Lally followed the look; Mab, tired with kneeling, had laid her head on the edge of the bed; she had, at first, closed her eyes, then had fallen asleep for very weariness. Her loosened hair was as a golden shower around her face; her dark eyelashes lay peacefully on her cheeks,

flushed with sleep ; her rosy lips were parted like a child's, and child-like and happy looked her slumbers.

But wild and stormy were Mab's dreams. She was in the cave again by the sea-shore, and she was there with Mr. O'Lally ; the foaming waves surrounded them, and Miss Emily, standing on the shore above, bade them rise higher and higher.

"Higher," she screamed, her voice rising louder than the roar of the ocean, "we will have no grey-eyed, no yellow-haired Marys here."

And Mr. O'Lally, smiling, said,

"We cannot live together, but we can die together, Mary."

It was then she awoke, and saw him standing before her, and Honour by him, bearing a tray, on which was a glass-full of sparkling yellow wine.

"Pray drink this," said Mr. O'Lally, taking the glass, and handing it to Mab.

She took it, but her left hand alone was free, and it shook as she lifted the glass to her lips ; he stooped to steady her hold, and as he did so, their eyes met. They forgot his sleeping sister—they forgot Honour, who stood by amazed, for no woman could see that look and mistake its meaning. It was love mutual—unconfessed, but ardent and impassioned. Sudden and violent love—the love that does not tarry for time.

Mab turned pale as death, for the thought of Robert shot through her heart like a keen arrow of pain. And Mr. O'Lally bit his lip, and turned his head away, for, in the very moment that he was conscious of his passion for this nameless girl, he vowed never to indulge it by making her his wife.

In her emotion, Mab spilled the wine, and mechanically moved her right hand, still held by Miss Emily. She awoke at once, and saw her with dilated eyes.

"The ghost !" she cried, dropping Mab's hand with horror ; "the dead girl !—take her away !—take her away !"

Mab started to her feet, and, instinctively, threw herself behind Mr. O'Lally for protection.

"Do not be afraid," he whispered ; "but pray leave the room—she no longer takes you for Annie."

Mab obeyed, and softly stole out. As she went down the staircase she met Annie Gardiner coming up with a light in her hand.

"You may go in now," said Mab to her, "the fit is over. You will be yourself again—I am Mary O'Flaherty now."

Miss Gardiner did not reply, and, looking at each other, the two girls felt rivals and enemies from that hour.

CHAPTER VI.

THE first feeling of Mab when she awoke the next day was one of terror. She did not think of her escape from the sea waves in the cave, of her deliverance from Miss Emily's frenzied grasp; she thought of that moment which had been the revelation of her new destiny, and she thought of it with despair. Joyful is the wakening of love in the free heart, but dreary is its first consciousness in the heart that has willingly forfeited its liberty. Every tie of honour, affection, and habit bound Mab to Robert Ford. He was her early friend and teacher; he was the son of her adopted father, the brother of William and Edward—the nephew of the woman who had been kind to her as a mother. To be false to him, whilst he was thousands of miles away, making a home for her in a new land, was the blackest treachery; Mab could not think of it without horror.

With this feeling blended another—revolted pride. What! to have been free two days before, and now to be a captive! To have surrendered her whole being, heart and soul, to a stranger, whose words and looks she could reckon! She felt bowed with shame at the thought. She hid her face in her hands, and buried it in her pillow, and wept aloud in the bitterness of her grief.

"My dear, what is the matter?" asked Miss Lavinia's kind voice.

Mab looked up, and saw Miss Ford bending over her with a face full of concern. She tried to laugh, and said, with forced cheerfulness,

"I have been over-excited, aunt, that is all. How is Miss Emily?"

"Oh! quite safe—but no one is to see her now, save Miss Gardiner and Honour. She must be kept very quiet, says Doctor Flinn; a very nice man. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know—I did not notice, aunt."

She spoke so faintly and looked so ill, that Miss Lavinia induced her not to get up, and even to spend that day in complete repose. But when the next morning came round, Mab, though still paler and more worn-looking, insisted on rising.

"I must be up and moving, aunt," she said, "or I am undone."

Miss Lavinia was accustomed to let Mab have her way, and though she thought the young girl looked very unwell, she re-

monstrated no more. Mab rose, dressed herself, said her prayers, and went downstairs. Breakfast was over, but Miss Ellen was below, ready and anxious to keep her company.

Poor Miss Ellen ! she was full of her sister, and of the Saturday night's adventures.

"Dear Emily ! she is *so* excitable," she said, plaintively ; "but, my dear child, you are very pale. Do take a second cup of coffee."

"Do you think it will give me a colour ?" asked Mab, trying to rally.

"Well, my dear, you do not want a colour now," innocently said Miss Ellen.

And indeed Mab did not, for the door had opened, and Mr. O'Lally had entered the room.

With great composure he inquired how she had slept, and how she felt ; and quickly rallying, Mab answered him in the same unconcerned tone.

There was nothing in Mr. O'Lally's calm manner of which Mab could complain ; it was courteous and kind, and she could ask for no more. But if anything in the long vigil by Miss Emily's sick-bed could have awakened hopes and wishes in a girl's heart, Mr. O'Lally's looks and tones on this morning were calculated to dispel either.

There are few men worthy of the name in its meaning of strength and power, that are not masters of their passions. When they are not, it is that they will not be so, and that they prefer self-indulgence to self-subjection. Mr. O'Lally's blood was not cold, but his will was strong, his judgment calm, and he had resolved to conquer, in its very dawn, the attraction that made him think Mab so irresistibly charming. She reminded him of his lost Mary, but as the lovely fulfilment of that broken promise. His reason had never approved the preference he gave her over Annie Gardiner, but Mab was all that he liked in either ; she had Mary's bright face and golden hair, she had the looks and smiles that moved his very heart, and with these, the nobler attributes of womanhood : the open mind, the generous nature. More than this, she had the charm in which Annie failed, at least for him, that something without a name, which makes the beloved woman queen of a man's heart, he himself knows not why.

And yet he had scarcely become conscious of his passion, when, without stopping to ask himself how it might fare with Mab, he had resolved to check and subdue it. Mr. O'Lally had grown up in the worship of blood, in the reverence of pure and

unsullied descent. Had Mab been the poorest Irish peasant's daughter, he would have married her with careless unconcern of what the little world around him might think and say. But he knew Mab's story, he felt convinced she was the child of sin and crime, he despised Mr. Ford, and he thought it possible that the disgrace of her birth might be revealed some day. His judgment and his pride alike forbade him to wed a woman who would bring shame as a dowry to him, and an inheritance to her children. Had he been a younger man he might not have thought so much on the subject; but Mr. O'Lally was twenty-six; he had loved, and conquered his love, and what he had done once he thought that he could do again. Perhaps he overrated his own strength, and did not take into sufficient account the proverbial weakness of a man's first love, and the hidden strength of a second passion; but there was this much to say in his favour: his had been, from his boyhood, a life of many sacrifices and much self-denial, and he was accustomed to see many loved aims recede before him, and to bend his will to what he most detested.

The task which habit rendered easy to him, the calmness and composure of his behaviour made less painful to Mab. Her own emotions had not allowed her to see this; and she had felt conscious of her own love without suspecting that it might be returned. She only thought of Robert, of her plighted faith, and her involuntary infidelity. She did not allow herself to dwell on the possibility that Mr. O'Lally might feel even more than she felt, or to be disappointed because his manner to her was only that of the courteous host. But what she admitted as just, Mab was woman enough to resent, and that resentment Mr. O'Lally had not the fortitude to bear with indifference.

Doctor Flinn called early at O'Lally's Town, and he gave a most favourable report of Miss Emily's condition. Miss Ellen's spirits rose, Miss Lavinia was elated, and Mr. O'Lally and Miss Gardiner spoke with increased cheerfulness of Miss Emily's rapid improvement.

The knowledge that she had caused no irremediable misfortune soothed Mab; she looked calm, though pale and serious, and her looks and her quiet manner secured the especial favour of Doctor Flinn, with whom Miss Gardiner had never been a favourite.

Doctor Flinn was accustomed to speak his mind very openly at O'Lally's Town, and he lost no time in conveying to Miss Ellen Ford his sense of Mab's merit.

"Your sister is going on famously," he said cheerfully, ad-

dressing that lady—"famously. I shall drop in again this evening, and we will have a round game of whist, Miss Nelly, and you and I shall be partners without cutting for it, and we will pair Mr. O'Lally and Miss Winter—and they shall be partners, not for life, unless, indeed, it be their pleasure."

Once more their looks met: a dangerous luxury; there was a perilous softness in Mab's dreamy grey eyes, which nearly shook Mr. O'Lally's fortitude, even as his ardent though brief look made her turn pale and tremble; but he was the first to rally. It might be bitter, but that self-subjection should be achieved; turning a displeased countenance on Doctor Flinn, he said in his most composed tones:

"You surely are not so severe, Doctor Flinn, as to inflict my company for life on any lady?"

But Doctor Flinn had partaken of a few extra glasses, poured out by Miss Ellen's liberal hand, and he was in a mood to brave even Mr. O'Lally's frowns.

"Now I call that fishing for a compliment," he said, nodding at the master of the house, "and one, too, which Miss Winter cannot afford to give you; though I have my own fancy, that she likes both Ireland and O'Lally's Town."

"Very much, for three months," replied Mab, whose pride the coolness of Mr. O'Lally's tone had wounded; "but oh! not for life!" she added, with a pretty shake of her head. "That would be too long a lease, Doctor Flinn. I am afraid, I really am, that I should feel dull at O'Lally's Town."

Miss Ellen only laughed good-humouredly, but Mr. O'Lally felt offended at Mab's pretty looks of disdain. Like all men of great strength, he had his own signal weaknesses, and one of the greatest was the exaggerated esteem in which he held O'Lally's Town. That any lady whom he might ask to share that dwelling with him should not find it a desirable abode, had never occurred to Mr. O'Lally. He was surprised and irritated at Mab's uncalled-for rejection of that home which, in his pride, he had not thought it possible to offer her; and though that pride forbade him to shew any resentment, and made him say with a smile, "Miss Winter is right—O'Lally's Town would be dull for more than a few weeks," Mab detected his secret annoyance, and from that moment resolved that Mr. O'Lally, if he could not love, should at least have a right to hate her.

Love cannot be passive. When it cannot bless, or be blest, it must torment. Mab was hurt at Mr. O'Lally's coldness. She would not have acknowledged it to herself, but it was so; a

look, a word, might have changed the nature of her sorrow, and turned it into alternatives of happiness or despair; but Mr. O'Lally had never betrayed himself thoroughly, or at least Mab had never thoroughly understood him. She was convinced of his indifference, and she burned with shame at her own folly. Anger with herself, fear of being detected, resentment of his coldness, all blended into one, and guided her conduct. The whole of that day Mab gave Mr. O'Lally, who was excluded from his sister's room, and remained chiefly below, those tokens of civil aversion which a man must be blind not to perceive, and which he cannot resent.

Mr. O'Lally had no varied knowledge of young girls; he had experienced nothing but kindness and gentleness from Miss Gardiner's preference, and he concluded that for some unexplained reason he had drawn on himself Miss Winter's displeasure. The thought gave him pain. He did not want her to love him, but he was not so prudent and so cold as to wish for her hatred. He wanted to conquer a passion he judged unwise, but Mab's keen and well-aimed shafts pierced even his strong shield of pride and will, and irritated rather than subdued the feelings he sought to check.

And as she had begun, Mab continued; her opportunities were frequent, and she lost none. His patience and gentleness did not disarm her. It may be that the presence of Miss Gardiner, who now and then left the sick-room, did not improve Mab's temper. It was when Mr. O'Lally's partner was with him that he received the least equivocal tokens of Mab's dislike.

One evening, a week after Miss Emily's illness had begun, matters came to a crisis. Mr. O'Lally came home one evening earlier than usual; Mab and Miss Gardiner were sitting together below. Mab was reading, and Miss Gardiner was sewing for poor children. One scarcely raised her eyes from her book, the other welcomed him with a gentle smile—and yet it was on Mab's downcast face that Mr. O'Lally's eyes rested with involuntary regret and longing. It would have been pleasant, even though it was useless, if she would but have looked up, and let her eyes meet his, and smile at him a friendly welcome; but she was deep in her book again, and Mr. O'Lally turned to Annie.

"Are you not well?" he asked, struck with something in her face.

"Oh! quite well," she replied, brightening up; "what should ail me?"

"Nothing, I hope, my dear partner, for I bring important

news for you. Pray, stay, Miss Winter," he added, quickly noticing that Mab was going to rise; "we shall be glad of your advice."

Mab sat down again, and looked profoundly indifferent.

"And pray, Mr. Bonaparte, what may this matter be?" asked Miss Gardiner.

Mr. Bonaparte laughed, and bit his lip, and their eyes met with a conscious gaze. Mab turned her head away, and, with a swelling heart, looked out of the window, near which she sat. And yet what was it to her?—were they not free to love and to marry, and was she?

Yet she listened to them. They were talking of a school Mr. O'Lally wanted to found near their factory. How eagerly Annie entered into his plans! She would pay the teachers—she would give the prizes. And how happy she looked, though happiness was not the prevailing expression of her countenance. Mab's sunny face, on the contrary, was under a cloud of discontent; the interest she might have taken in Mr. O'Lally's plans was spoiled by Annie's participation in them, and she strove in vain against this jealous and resentful feeling.

"I am afraid our factory scheme has bored you," said Mr. O'Lally, rising, and going up to her.

"Oh! I did not listen to it all," answered Mab.

"It is a pity," he persisted; "we might have benefited by your advice."

"Oh, no!" she quietly replied, looking up in his face; "my advice would have been thoroughly useless. I am as ignorant as I am powerless. I have neither opinions to offer, nor teachers to pay."

Mr. O'Lally reddened, and bowing calmly, left Mab, and returned to Miss Gardiner. He was scarcely gone when Mab's heart smote her for the needless insolence of her reply. Why could she not be at peace with him? The time would come when they must part. In a few weeks, miles of sea and land would divide her for ever from Mr. O'Lally, and she would see his face no more. It seemed so cruel that it also seemed impossible, and yet it would be so. No doom ever came to the condemned more surely than this would come to her. Ah! why then not leave a gracious image behind! Why be hateful because she could not be loved? Unavailing penitence; that same evening Mab sinned again. Doctor Flinn came in for his favourite game of whist. Mab refused to play. Her head ached, she said.

"A most becoming headache," gallantly replied Doctor Flinn, "but whist will cure it."

Mab shook her languid head, in token of denial. Doctor Flinn persisted :

"Now let me tempt you. I shall actually forsake Miss Nelly, and be your partner."

Mab smiled, but did not yield to the temptation, which it pleased Doctor Flinn to consider irresistible.

"My aunt will be your partner," she said.

"My dear," cried Miss Lavinia, frightened, "you know I am a shocking hand at whist."

"Not at all, I am sure," insisted Doctor Flinn ; "besides, we will allow your niece to advise you, ma'am."

Mr. O'Lally had not meant to play ; Mab, by abstaining, compelled him to do so, for Annie was upstairs. She saw the shade of annoyance that crossed his face, and resented it as a personal offence, to be avenged as soon as could be. The game began. Mab sat between her aunt and Mr. O'Lally ; her head rested against the back of Miss Lavinia's deep leather chair ; exquisitely delicate looked her pale face on that dark background. Involuntarily, perhaps, Mr. O'Lally's look sought it. Those clear outlines, these waves of golden hair, the dark eyelashes resting on the pale cheek, attracted his eye irresistibly ; involuntarily, too, his face expressed tender pity for her suffering. Raising her eyes, Mab caught that look, and in her sensitive pride, misinterpreted it at once. Did he think she was pining for him ?—and did he dare to pity her ? She would soon show him whether she was fond of him or not. She watched her opportunity ; it came at length.

Mr. O'Lally turned to Doctor Flinn, and, in doing so, exposed his hand. Mab did not move, but her side-long look took in every card in one rapid glance. Mr. O'Lally had no trumps, and Miss Lavinia had a tribe of diamonds ; he had the leading spades, and Miss Lavinia was convinced they were in Doctor Flinn's hand ; but Mab knew better, she silently pointed to every card Miss Lavinia should play, and every card told, and won a trick, and the odd trick gave Doctor Flinn and his partner the game, the last of a long rubber.

"Out !" he shouted in an ecstasy of delight ; "out, Miss Livy !"—the familiar appellation slipped out in the joy of the moment. "Those diamonds came in beautifully, and that keeping back of the spades does you infinite credit, Miss Ford. Mr.

O'Lally, you owe us five shillings—two and sixpence is your share, madam."

At the mention of money Mab started and reddened, for she felt what she had done. There was no time to lose, and, pulling her aunt's sleeve, she said, in as calm a tone as she could command :

"Aunt, you cannot take that money. I saw Mr. O'Lally's cards when he turned to speak to Doctor Flinn."

Miss Lavinia's outstretched hand was arrested by surprise, and the two and sixpence remained untouched. Doctor Flinn's eyes opened, Miss Ellen looked amazed ; Mr. O'Lally, who had detected Mab at once, and had watched with keen pain the process of her little cheating, alone showed no surprise.

Doctor Flinn was the first to speak ; he kindly tried to mend matters.

"Oh ! if Miss Winter thought we were playing for love——"

"No, I did not," interrupted Mab, "but I forgot all about the money."

"And you wanted Miss Ford to win—very natural !"

"It was not that," said Mab, who felt impelled to commit herself.

"Miss Winter wanted me to lose," put in Mr. O'Lally smiling. He looked at her as he spoke ; her colour came and went beneath his gaze, but she scorned to deny.

Doctor Flinn returned the money, but Mr. O'Lally pushed it back to him, still smiling.

"Take your two and sixpence, Doctor Flinn," he said ; "we all know how you spend your card-money. Besides, the game is lawfully yours. I saw Miss Winter look into my cards, and I abetted her."

"Why so ?" asked Mab, with a pretty, serpent-like motion of her fair head.

"Because it is a pleasure to lose to Doctor Flinn," composedly replied Mr. O'Lally ; "the money he loses is really lost, but that which he wins goes into a poor-box, which, thanks to his kind heart, is rarely full."

Mab turned pale, she felt humbled and penetrated : and Miss Ellen, who, spite her good humour, thought it but right to give this erratic whist-player a lesson, said, with one of her knowing nods,

"Ah ! you must take care of our brother, Miss Winter. I warn you that, quiet as he looks, he has a keen eye—nothing

escapes him. We find him very inconvenient sometimes ; and as to his hearing, it is wonderful."

" Indeed ! " said Mab, and she looked up, not at Miss Ellen, but at Mr. O'Lally, with smiling defiance. He returned the look with one of sorrowful gravity. He did not want her love, but he hated the thought of her unmerited aversion, and, less penetrating than his sister had painted him to be, he did not understand the true meaning of Mab's pertinacious ill-will.

In the meanwhile, Miss Lavinia was sorely troubled. She looked at the two and sixpence still before her, and restlessly wondered what she should do with that awkward half-crown ; at length it occurred to her that to ask Doctor Flinn to put the money into his poor-box would be the most proper and convenient way of getting rid of it. Whilst she uttered her request with her usual earnestness, Mab, overwhelmed with shame and keen distress, left her seat, walked to the nearest window, and looked out at the night. A pale soft moon hung in the sky, and touched with tender light the white mists that floated in the air above the garden.

" What can he think of me ? " thought Mab, leaning her burning forehead against the cool pane. Her heart was tortured at the mere suspicion of his contempt. She did not know that, anxious to ascertain the cause of her persistent displeasure, Mr. O'Lally had left the group at the table, and was now standing within a few paces of her. Seeing her so deeply absorbed and unconscious of his vicinity, he addressed her :

" Miss Winter, I want you to forgive me, firstly ; and secondly, to tell me my sin."

" Sir ! " said Mab, turning round on him haughtily ; but her pride vanished when she looked at his face—it was both suppliant and tender. When she saw him standing there before her, beseeching and respectful, her heart beat, and her head swam, for, to behold him thus bending all his pride before her, and seeking for her favour, was a pleasure too keen not to verge upon pain. Oh ! to be loved and wooed, and to be free ! " Indeed, Mr. O'Lally, you are too good to trouble yourself about me," she said, with a sudden shyness that became her ; " if you knew me better you would not wonder at my ways. I have the most unfortunate temper, that constantly compels me to do the strangest things, and, as you saw this evening, the most wrong."

She left the window as she spoke. Mr. O'Lally stood looking after her, annoyed and disappointed. There was a want of frankness in her reply that struck and pained him, and he got

speedy proof of her insincerity. He walked back to the group around the table, and stood behind Miss Lavinia's chair, facing Doctor Flinn, Mab, and Miss Ellen.

"Pray excuse the question I am going to put," suddenly said Doctor Flinn, turning from Mab to Miss Lavinia, "but is not Miss Winter a proof of my proposition, that golden-haired young ladies are decidedly hasty?"

"Indeed, Doctor Flinn," replied Miss Lavinia, with great earnestness, "I am sorry to contradict you, but my niece is a proof of the very reverse. She has the sweetest temper: it is almost impossible to provoke her."

"But she is capricious," persisted Doctor Flinn, winking knowingly; "takes sudden dislikes and strong aversions."

"Indeed, no, Doctor Flinn," rather warmly said Miss Lavinia, "Mab is too forgiving, if anything. If you want to know her faults I will tell them to you, though she is here——"

"No, thank you," interrupted Doctor Flinn, "thanks to your unimpeachable testimony, I know Miss Winter's faults: she is deceitful; she has just been doing all she could to convince Miss Nelly and me that she had a bad temper, and not a very good heart—but we know her now. Excuse the slyness of my cross-examination; I was bred a lawyer, and a man cannot help being sly who has ever had anything to do with the law. Besides, we Irish are a dreadfully sly people, Miss Ford."

Miss Lavinia, much amazed at being thus taken in, said not one word; and Mr. O'Lally, still standing behind her chair, thence looked at Mab, reproachfully.

CHAPTER VII.

"It is a hopeless case," thought Mab, with something like despair; "I am destined to become hateful to him, ay, hateful and contemptible too."

"Now, my dear, that was too bad of you," said Miss Ellen, seeming to echo Mab's thoughts; and coming up, in her friendly way, to the spot where Mab sat apart, "what has our brother done that you should join his enemies?"

Mab looked round: she was alone with Miss Ellen. Doctor Flinn and Mr. O'Lally were gone, and their voices could be heard in the next room in animated conversation; Miss Lavinia, too, had disappeared; she could answer, unchecked by any restraint:

"Enemies! Surely Mr. O'Lally has none?"

"Indeed, then, and he ought to have none," warmly replied Miss Ellen; "but, would you believe it, Miss Winter," she added, in a tone of amazement, justified by the enormity of the fact, "there is actually a set of men in the country who are making a stand against him!"

"Indeed!" said Mab.

"You may well be surprised. If I had not got it on the unimpeachable authority of Doctor Flinn, I could not believe it. And would you believe it, Miss Winter, that wretched Mr. Briggs is actually at their head! The man who, a week ago, was ready to worship the ground on which our brother trod."

"It is dreadful," ironically said Mab.

"And all about that foolish little bit of a bridge across Shane's river. Now, you know, Miss Winter, that is quite absurd. Our brother has carried everything else before him. The new road went the way he bid it take, just convenient to O'Lally's Town. He stopped the mines that would have ruined the country and his property; and he set up the fisheries that are thriving so wonderfully; he did not allow any other factory to appear, and compete with his—for two cannot stand here—and it was all for the good of the country, of course—for competition is the ruin of trade, and brings down the wages of working men lamentably. Moreover, it was he who had the management of every school and charity—I mean the secular part, of course—for miles around; and would you believe it, Miss Winter, the clergy, by whom my brother stood through thick and thin, are deserting him, and have joined with the Briggs Protestant faction, to proclaim our brother a despot and a tyrant, and to say that they will no longer submit to him!"

"And since when has all this arisen?" asked Mab.

"Well, it seems it has been brooding a long time, and that Doctor Flinn has warned our brother; but I never suspected it till this evening, and I am still all upset and amazed. And what do you think has caused the break out? Why, that stupid bit of a bridge across Shane's river."

"It is the last drop of water that overflows the full cup," Mab could not help saying.

But Miss Ellen did not understand her.

"It is so foolish," she resumed; "for you know, Miss Winter, the country could not stand without our brother. Why, what was it before he set himself to work?—he has been the making of it; there is no one dare deny it—no one," added

Miss Ellen, warming with her subject; "and Doctor Flinn actually told me to speak to our brother, and bid him to be careful. I told him I would as soon dare and take off my head, and bade him do it himself; and I dare say the audacious man is actually doing it now. I do wish I could hear what he is saying to our brother."

"But you surely are not afraid of Mr. O'Lally?" almost indignantly said Mab; "he always seems so gentle with you."

"That is just it; I never had a cross word from him, and I could not bear the thought of a displeased look."

Even as she uttered this true definition of love, the door opened, and Mr. O'Lally and Doctor Flinn entered.

"We shall be much better here," said Doctor Flinn, sitting down in a round arm-chair. "Besides, it is more private."

Mab, on hearing this, was going to come forward and show herself; but Miss Ellen checked her, and whispered an entreaty to remain quiet, which Mab would not have heeded, but for Mr. O'Lally's reply to Doctor Flinn's remark.

"The whole world is welcome to hear you."

Doctor Flinn was probably confident that the whole world was not within hearing, for, without giving a look to the remote window in which Miss Ellen and Mab were standing, he folded his hands so as to make the tips of his thumbs and fingers meet, and looking at them very attentively, he said, in a slightly hesitating tone:

"Mr. O'Lally, be wise; there is, I repeat, a strong party against you."

Mr. O'Lally, who stood leaning with his back to the high stone mantel-piece, laughed scornfully.

"The Briggs faction—I know all about it."

"No, you don't—you don't," testily said Doctor Flinn; "you have, for the last three years, pretty well ruled this part of Ireland, and your long and unbroken prosperity blinds you; but to tell you the truth, Mr. O'Lally, the yoke has been a heavy one, and that Shane's bridge seems likely to finish it. It really is too much—a bridge built with public money, and leading, as it were, only to your own door."

Mr. O'Lally's blue eyes flashed fire, and his finely cut lips grew white with anger, but he mastered himself, and said, calmly,

"You are plain-spoken, Doctor Flinn—a proof of friendship, I suppose; but I have told you and others again and again, that this bridge will become the leading thoroughfare of the country.

Houses will rise where you now see the barren waste. I mean to build at once some handsome cottages and villas along the seashore: they will sell or let rapidly. Give me five years, and I will pay Shane's bridge out of my own pocket, and leave the benefit of it to you."

"So you said about those fisheries, and we have been spending and speculating, and the benefit is yet to come. The country looks better, no doubt; and you are better, that is certain—but we are devilishly the poorer, my dear fellow."

Mab saw Mr. O'Lally start at the familiar appellation; perhaps it was the surest token he had yet received of his failing power, but he scorned to betray his secret resentment.

"Doctor Flinn," he said, "you may tell the Briggs set that sent you——"

"They did not send me."

"That they must yield."

"They will not."

"Or I must leave the country," pursued Mr. O'Lally, without heeding the interruption; "but before I leave, I charge you to tell them this: when my sisters bought O'Lally's Town the country was only fit for savages."

"We are much obliged to you," drily said Doctor Flinn.

"The population consisted of ignorant poor and apathetic rich, and between both nothing was done. Who built a chapel, a church of stone, I may say, instead of the miserable barn that was a disgrace to a Catholic country?"

"Well," said Doctor Flinn, coughing behind his hand, "we do not deny your services in that case. You gave the land, and set the whole thing going."

"Who built the school?" continued Mr. O'Lally.

"Well, we did, but if it were not for you, why, we might have let it lie by. We do not deny all that, Mr. O'Lally."

"Who checked those foolish mines that would have drained your pockets? Who promoted the fisheries that will fill them yet? And finally, who established a factory that gave work to hundreds, and banished famine from their homes?"

"You did. But, Mr. O'Lally, that said factory is said to bring you in a handsome penny."

"It brings me in a fortune," unhesitatingly said Mr. O'Lally; "every farthing of which is spent in the country. I declare to you, Doctor Flinn, as God is my judge, that a shilling of that money is not invested in a selfish purpose. If anything I have begun fails, I am the first to be ruined thereby. Why, I have

not yet paid back my sisters the money they sank in the purchase of this estate."

"We do not deny all that," said Doctor Flinn, very much embarrassed.

"No—you merely forget it."

"No, we don't, Mr. O'Lally; but there are some who say you have your own purposes to serve—as why should you not?—that you would like a seat in Parliament——"

"And you believe it, Doctor Flinn," said Mr. O'Lally, with much disdain; "a seat in Parliament!—to be a voice among hundreds of voices, to be answerable to constituents and vote at their bidding—to be last perhaps, instead of being, as I am here, first—I thought you knew me better."

"That is just it," eagerly cried Doctor Flinn, "you will be first, and the yoke is heavy. At first it was all pleasantness; but you have grown used to power, and you think it your due, and we are nothing, and no one."

"A few words more and I cease," said Mr. O'Lally; "remind them of all I have done——"

"I think I would suggest not to do so."

"Remind them of what I have done, and tell them that if they oppose my will in the matter of Shane's bridge, I shall, once for all, meddle no more in their concerns."

"I am afraid that is what they want."

"Let them, if they dare—let them, if they dare!" cried Mr. O'Lally, his voice rising, and all his compressed passion breaking forth; "let them forsake the man of energy and enterprise amongst them, and sink once more into the Slough of Despond whence I drew them. When the strong arm that supported them is withdrawn, we shall see how they will get on. I know them, and I know myself. Amongst other men I should only be an ordinary man, but with them I am a giant. I tell you they cannot now do without me; and if I leave, it is their ruin."

"We do not want you to leave," said Doctor Flinn, looking uneasy.

"No—of course not; you want me to stay and curry favour, and work at your bidding; but I will be first, or I will be nothing. I will either make this as thriving, as rich, and industrious a part of Ireland as there is, or I will leave it to its fate. Do you think I cannot carry my capital and my energy elsewhere, and raise myself another home?"

"Indeed, O'Lally, we cannot do without you," soothingly

said Doctor Flinn—"indeed, we cannot; only we are not children, and you must just let us have a leetle bit of our own way. Now take the advice of a friend. Marry Annie Gardiner. She is dying to have you, and she has a strong family connexion, and it would set you up again the first among us."

"Miss Gardiner would be very much obliged to you for the suggestion," coldly observed Mr. O'Lally.

"Then indeed she would," bluntly replied Doctor Flinn, "for any one can see which way the wind blows."

"Miss Gardiner has nothing to do with my answer, and that you have received," curtly said Mr. O'Lally.

Doctor Flinn rose, looking dissatisfied enough with the result of his embassy, and was moving towards the door, when Miss Ellen, unable to keep in any longer, exclaimed from the window,

"Then indeed, Doctor Flinn, I am surprised at you! I am amazed, Doctor Flinn!"

Miss Ellen's anger could rise no higher than surprise.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Doctor Flinn, "I thought you were alone, Mr. O'Lally."

Mr. O'Lally smiled in a way that showed Mab he had detected her and his sister all along, but he only replied with a careless,

"Oh, no!"

"Yes, I am surprised," said Miss Ellen, coming forward, and persisting in this form of indignation; "it is not enough for you, Doctor Flinn, to make yourself the mouth-piece of that little foolish Briggs set, but you must even bring in my dear Miss Gardiner's name."

"And pray, Miss Nelly, what harm did I say of the young lady?"

"You said, 'anyone could see which way the wind blew.'"

"And that is no slander, surely. No, no, Miss Nelly, you must make out a stronger case against me."

Whilst Miss Nelly was internally doing her best to make out a stronger case against Doctor Flinn, that shrewd gentleman was making his way out of the room, and once he had set his foot beyond the threshold, he cried out,

"Too late, Miss Nelly—too late now—the courts are closed. We shall hear you to-morrow."

"I am surprised at Doctor Flinn," again said Miss Nelly, when, after having shown his visitor out, Mr. O'Lally returned

to the sitting room. He could not help laughing at his sister's discomfiture, and asked,

"Why so?"

"To talk to you as he did!" she cried, warmly; "I am amazed at the man's audacity!"

"Yes, it is surprising," said Mr. O'Lally, with irony, yet not without bitterness too; "he would not have done it two months back."

"Done it, indeed!—he would have crept into a mouse-hole first."

"She loves him, and she is luring him on to his ruin," thought Mab, and an irresistible impulse made her say,

"Why not take a warning—even from Doctor Flinn?"

"Because, when Doctor Flinn warns it is too late," calmly replied Mr. O'Lally; "and a man must either stand by what he has done, or fall—there is no medium."

"And yet," persisted Mab, "if it were not too late?"

Mr. O'Lally was walking up and down the room; he stopped before Mab, and looked at her with some surprise; he was not accustomed to such interference from the feminine members of his family, and he had not expected it from Mab. Yet it did not displease him; far from it—his look softened, and he drew nearer to her.

"You are too good," he said, "to care whether it is too late or not. Those for whose welfare I have toiled three years, have but one wish—my downfall."

"Ah! be wise then!—be wise!" urged Mab, beseechingly; "do not give them that triumph!"

"Dear Miss Winter, it would not be wisdom to follow your counsel—it would but be hastening my own ruin."

He spoke almost tenderly; he was moved by the entreaty of Mab's tone, and he well-nigh forgot his sister's presence. Miss Ellen, her first surprise over to hear Mab urge advice on her brother, and Mr. O'Lally actually argue with her concerning the line of conduct he should follow, came up to them a little jealously, and thought she too would put in her word.

"Indeed, my dear brother," she said, "there was a good deal of wisdom in what Doctor Flinn said concerning Annie; and, indeed, you could not do a better thing than marry the dear girl."

"Indeed!" said Mr. O'Lally, and he looked at Mab.

But wise is the man who can read a woman's heart, and fathom the secret she is bent on concealing. Mab remained unmoved and cold, neither her looks nor her countenance gave the

least clue to her feelings. She wore the reserved mien of one who finds herself unduly brought into some family matter, and who will take part neither way. Mr. O'Lally was slightly disappointed. He did not want to marry Mab, but he did not want her either to be so calmly indifferent. However, he, too, was expert in the art of concealing his feelings, and, turning to his sister, he said, playfully,

"I am surprised at you, Miss Nelly; Miss Nelly, I am amazed!"

Miss Nelly blushed and laughed, and, taking Mab's arm within her own, she bade her brother good night.

"Now, how that Doctor Flinn must have upset me!" she said, stopping short as they stood in the hall; "I was actually forgetting dear Emily's message. She goes away to-morrow morning with Annie, for change of air, and she wants to see you this evening. I have not seen her yet, but do not think I am jealous, my dear."

Mab smiled, and declaring herself ready to see Miss Emily, she proceeded alone to that lady's room on the second floor. Both room and tenant were altered since Mab had seen them last. The room was bright and cheerful; the bed was made and the pillow smooth, and in an arm-chair near a small table sat Miss Emily, pale and mild as ever. She held out her hand to Mab with a cheerful smile, and at once made her sit down by her side.

"I have asked to see you alone," she said gently, "because I know I went on with some strange speeches and deeds whilst I was delirious, and I am afraid I may have frightened you."

"Not much," hesitatingly replied Mab.

"I took you for Mary O'Flaherty," continued Miss Emily, reddening—"for one whom I once loved dearly, but who proved false. As I do not know how I told you the story in my delirium, allow me to tell it you, briefly but plainly, now that I am in my right senses. Mary O'Flaherty was our neighbour for some time. She was very pretty, very good-natured, and, there is no denying it, our brother liked her. He liked her so well that he determined on marrying her. He wrote to her, asking her to fix the day. I saw the letter—man never wrote more truly nor yet more fondly; and would you believe it, Miss Winter, she never answered him, and, availing herself of a short but severe illness of our dear brother, she went off to America with her brother! She died there six months after her arrival. This is the whole story, and that is why, my dear, I detest the

very name of Mary O'Flaherty, much as I once loved her. I tell you all this to explain the unkind speeches I uttered in my delirium. Every word of them was meant for a poor dead girl whom I have long since forgiven."

"I am sorry you have troubled yourself with this explanation," said Mab, quietly, "for it has agitated you."

"Not much," replied Miss Emily, trying to seem calm, "but I wished to tell you this."

She seemed fatigued. Mab left her and went up to Miss Lavinia. She found that lady amazed at her long absence. Mab explained it briefly. She could not bear to talk.

"Robert has not written, and that is what troubles her," thought Miss Ford.

Mab thought of Robert, but she thought of another too. She lay awake that night, as she had often lain of late, striving with all her might against the feeling that had invaded her heart, calling in gratitude, duty, honour, to her aid, and calling them in vain. The scene she had that evening witnessed was not calculated to banish Mr. O'Lally's image from her mind. This beneficent despot, who had surrendered his ardent youth to so unselfish an ambition, was the very man to charm an imaginative girl's heart. He wanted power; true—but did he not deserve it, and was not the use he made of it exalted and generous? Oh! if his enemies could only read him truly, if they only would check their mean and narrow jealousies, and acknowledge their master! But they would not. Mr. O'Lally stood on the brink of a precipice, beneath which lay ruin. And he would not yield—he had said so; Mab knew he would not yield, and, knowing that his ruin was all but certain, she almost wished in her despair, that he would marry Annie Gardiner, and retrieve, with his own fortunes, that fair edifice of prosperity and hope which he had raised for his country.

"What matter about me," bitterly thought Mab; "a few weeks more, and I shall see the last of him, and he is sure to forget me."

"My dear, what ails you?" asked Miss Ford, when Mab rose the next morning. "You look quite unwell."

"I had a bad night, aunt, that is all."

"But it is a great deal, my dear; and do you know, I think you sleep badly in O'Lally's Town. I so often hear you complaining of bad nights."

"It is the air of O'Lally's Town, aunt. I suppose Miss Emily leaves early?"

Miss Emily and Miss Gardiner left after breakfast. Mr. O'Lally accompanied them, but was to return the same day. Miss Ellen saw them depart with a tear in her eye, and stood on the doorstep till the carriage was out of sight; then she re-entered the house with a sigh, and said to Mab, who walked in with her:

"I never can bear to part with Emily, and we never have parted but something dreadful happened to either. The last time I left her, Emily broke one of her front teeth; another time she lost her trunk, in which were her two best silks. In short, it distresses me to let her go. Something will come of it, you may rely upon it."

"She is under good care," said Mab, a little drily.

"You mean Annie. Well, Annie is very good, but she is peculiar, too. You never know what she feels, thinks, and does, and I sometimes wonder if she cares for people to whom she says so little. Yet I know she likes us, loves us, I shall say—and Emily is dearly fond of her. I believe she would have her whilst she was ill, and thought it best not to have me; still, will Annie care for her as I would?"

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. O'LALLY came home earlier than he was expected. He came, too, prepared to give his sister and their guests an un-hoped-for-pleasure—an excursion to Shane's Cascade. It was but a few miles away, yet taking it for granted that the ladies could not bear much fatigue, Mr. O'Lally had procured three ponies, and, taking it for granted, too, that no opposition to his scheme would be raised, he had come home in order to carry it out at once. His quiet will asserted itself, and prevailed. Spite her secret terror of the precipices, Miss Ford yielded, and Mab did not attempt to conceal her delight as they set forth. She felt gentle and good. The afternoon was lovely, and Mr. O'Lally walked by her side.

"I declare that is the Red House!" suddenly cried Miss Ellen.

Mab looked. In a wild glen before them rose a long, low building, dotted with innumerable windows, and crowned with gaunt chimneys. "How ugly it looks in that lovely solitude!" thought Mab. Do not lament over that desecration of Nature's beauty. A day will come, Mab, when you will lament to see this spot once more a silent waste.

"I do not read admiration in your eyes, Miss Winter," said Mr. O'Lally: "Now confess, you would like this glen better if I had left it as I found it three years back."

"Is yours the only factory near us?" asked Mab, without answering his question.

"The only one in the province, I believe; but though I shall not oppose others later, now I cannot allow any; they would ruin the country—one is as much as it can bear."

"Autocrat," thought Mab.

Yet when they drew nearer—when she beheld the cottages, not mere wretched cabins, hovels scarcely fit for cattle, but homes with a look of comfort about them, and their strip of garden attached to each—when she saw the decently clothed tenants, the air of prosperity and content which already spread over that once desolate valley, her heart swelled, and she thought, "Would there were many such despots in the land!"

And she could not wonder that, spite of all Doctor Flinn's warnings, he should seem so confident and so serene. How could he believe that he, the artificer of so much good, should fall?

"I put it to you, Miss Winter," said Miss Ellen, to Mab; "is it not too much that a man like my brother should be interfered with about that little bit of Shane's bridge? What you have seen to-day is nothing, and he says himself that this factory is only in its infancy; but you have been in the new chapel, and is it not beautiful? And then the school, and the road, and the fisheries, and a hundred little matters beside. I am amazed at Doctor Flinn—I am!"

Mr. O'Lally laughed as he heard her. He seemed very cheerful. Who would have thought that he had had bad news that very morning!

They left the Red House behind. Their path now wound by a rippling little river, which flowed beneath the shade of aspens and willows. Slender grasses and wild flowers edged its banks of clear sand. Numerous winged insects hovered over its tranquil bed, now green as emerald, now blue as the sky it reflected. The rush of wings of some startled bird, the rustling in the grass of some invisible little creature stealing away to some safer hiding place, the wind passing through the slender boughs of the young trees, were the only sounds that broke on the stillness of the hour.

Mab felt in an exquisite reverie. The coolness of the air, the low murmur of the flowing river, the soft broken sounds

that came from everywhere around her, the steady motion of her little mountain pony, were so many sources of deep though nameless delight.

And pleasantest of all, Mr. O'Lally walked by her, and, answering her questions, told her why this pleasant stream was called Shane's River.

"Shane was the owner of all these lands before the English came. He was a Prince, a warrior; and in his way a great man. He fought bravely against the invaders, and fell in battle before they had conquered. The people gratefully honoured his memory, and though his possessions passed away to strangers, they have, with few exceptions, preserved the name of the popular hero. We have Shane's River, Shane's Cascade, Shane's Castle, and Shane's Country."

Mab looked up and hesitated.

"Shane's Country," he said, anticipating her question, "is the very significant name which has been given to the spot where Shane is reputed to lie buried. It is a beautiful little churchyard in those hills on our left; a few minutes will take us there."

This proposal, on being submitted to Miss Ellen and Miss Lavinia, received their immediate assent. A path, safe and easy, led them to the spot; and in a few minutes Mr. O'Lally and his guests had reached Shane's Country.

It lay in the hollow of the mountains—a small enclosed field, green with the hillocks of nameless graves. A ruined round tower, covered with ivy, seemed to guard the spot, and a Gothic porch stood in the centre—the entrance to a once noble abbey, of which every other vestige had long since vanished. Standing near this, Mab surveyed the prospect below, and saw with admiration the seemingly endless line of shore which skirted the green ocean waves, enclosed in their turn by the white, thin, misty circle of the horizon.

An exclamation of dismay uttered by Miss Ellen, and proceeding from the other side of the porch, roused both Mab and Mr. O'Lally.

"My dear brother," she said agitatedly, "what is this?"

Passing underneath the arch, Mr. O'Lally joined his sister; Mab followed him, but found it hard to understand, at first, what had happened, for Mr. O'Lally bit his lip, and said, with a frown,

"I shall inquire into it, Ellen."

Miss Ellen turned to Miss Ford, and, pointing to a new-made grave, which had been dug near a square monument of some pretensions, she said, plaintively,

"Would you believe, Lavinia, that this grave has been dug three months, and that though it lies close to the monument where our dear mother and her ancestors are buried, and is an infringement on our rights, we cannot ascertain by whom, nor for whom, it has been made. My own belief," added Miss Ellen, with much agitation, "is, that it is meant for one of us."

"Ellen!—my dear Ellen," quickly said her brother, leading her away, "never say that again if you love me!"

Mab could not hear Miss Ellen's reply, but with concern she saw that Miss Lavinia was pale as death.

"Aunt!" she cried.

"I wish we had never come to Ireland," said Miss Lavinia; "it is a dreadful country, Mab!" and she followed Mr. O'Lally and his sister out of the cemetery.

This incident, slight though it was, had thrown a gloom over the party, which Mr. O'Lally vainly endeavoured to dispel. His sister was depressed, Miss Lavinia looked startled, and Mab herself was silent. Their route lay once more by Shane's River; the day and the spot had lost none of their beauty, but the feeling which had made both so delightful an hour back, was gone.

"Now is the time to alight," said Mr. O'Lally.

Mab looked up. They had reached a steep and rocky path shaded by trees, but which no longer wound by the river. It went up a rocky ascent, under the deepest of green shades. Ferns and mosses grew freely in this congenial clime; a narrow thread of water stole down the rocks with a silvery sound. Mab was breathless with delight. The chill air, the verdant gloom, the cool-looking plants, which the sun's hot rays had never withered, fulfilled all her dreams of the homes of the Pagan nymphs or of Northern nixes. Here might have dwelt the Roman's ideal, Egeria—here Undine, wearied of human love and its ingratitude, might have found a home of eternal beauty. Snow, ice, and winter could not be here; perpetual spring, and a freshness summer could never invade, surely had made their home in this favoured spot.

The more they ascended, the lovelier grew the sight, for the waters flowed in a fuller stream, and leaped down the rocks with a more rapid bound. At length the cascade was reached. There it was before them—a sheet of silver bounding among rocks and trees; its shivering summit vanishing in a clear rainbow; its lowest waters flowing away in the gloom of the valley they had just left behind them.

"How do you like Shane's Cascade?" asked Miss Ellen of Mab.

She was leaning on the arm of her brother, for she seemed timid and nervous, and by no means appeared to enjoy the romantic scene.

"I could not have imagined it half so beautiful," replied Mab.

She looked at Mr. O'Lally, but he was absorbed with his sister. Was she cold? did she feel unwell? would she like to go? The truest as well as the kindest solicitude appeared in his questions. At length he suggested brisk motion, to which she assented, and they moved away arm-in-arm along a little path that led round the waterfall. Mab did not follow. She sat down on a cold rock, damp with spray, and felt sad and forsaken.

It is a strange thing to look on at a love in which we have no share—strange, and often bitter. Mab had her own home affections, but she felt very keenly, too keenly, perhaps, that she had no ties of blood. Mr. Ford was not her father, Miss Lavinia was not her aunt, William and Edward were not her brothers. Mr. O'Lally's love for his sisters appeared to her in all its sweetness, in all its holy tenderness, and her heart ached. She stood without that fond and tender circle in which his heart was centred. A vague yearning, a tumultuous jealousy, agitated her. In vain she thought of Robert. His love seemed remote and cold—a troublesome bond in the past, a void for the present and the future. With the consciousness of infidelity came the sting of its utter hopelessness. Mr. O'Lally did not care for her—who did? In his heart he despised her; she was no one, a foundling, an outcast, a nameless girl, whom the poorest of O's and Macs felt a right to scorn.

She rose on seeing him return with his sister, and began climbing among the rocks in search of ferns.

"Miss Winter, take care," said Mr. O'Lally's voice, in a tone of alarm.

Mab, who stood on a projecting rock, close to the fall of the water, looked round with a secure smile.

"Take care," urged Mr. O'Lally, leaving his sister's arm to come up to her, "a life was lost where you now stand."

Mab shook her head rebelliously, and without heeding his remonstrative exclamations, she nimbly leaped down from rock to rock. Her footing was sure, and she was fearless—two warrants of safety; she passed by him unharmed, declining, with a cold, careless smile, his proffered hand, and soon stood safe by Miss Lavinia. Her manner was capricious and proud. He had offended her, but how so? Time to perplex himself with these

questions was not given him : he heard a low cry, and, hastily turning round, he saw his sister Ellen, whom he had left for a moment, slip, and fall among the rocks. In a second he was by her, and had raised her.

"Are you hurt?" he cried.

"Yes—I believe my ankle is sprained."

She tried to walk, but the attempt caused her such exquisite pain, that she relinquished it at once. Without more ado, Mr. O'Lally lifted his sister up in his arms and carried her swiftly down to the spot where they had left their ponies in charge of Michael, who had come there by appointment. Miss Ellen was placed on the back of hers, supported by her brother, whilst the servant led it slowly along.

"Where are we going?" asked Miss Ellen.

"To Doctor Flinn's. I dare not fatigue you so far as to take you home now."

To Dr. Flinn's they all went : the pleasure of the day marred by this untoward accident.

Doctor Flinn owned a very pleasant cottage, not far from Shane's Country, and which stood on the outskirts of a village of some pretensions. This, however, the cavalcade had no need to enter, and they reached Doctor Flinn's abode with all the privacy they could wish for. A neat servant-girl opened the door, and, without waiting to be announced, Mr. O'Lally, again taking his sister in his arms, carried her into Miss Flinn's parlour.

"Bless my soul!" cried Miss Flinn, dropping her work, "what has happened?"

"Ellen has sprained her ankle. Is Doctor Flinn within?"

"No, but I am; do you think I cannot prescribe for a sprained ankle?"

The chance of prescribing for Miss Ellen was not left to Miss Flinn, for, even as she spoke, her brother's voice was heard in the hall. He came in lively and bustling, and, on learning the state of the case, said, in a loud clear voice :

"It is nothing, and it will be nothing, but Miss Ellen must not stir—that's all—and not to stir, she must remain here."

Miss Ellen looked blank, and even Mr. O'Lally seemed annoyed; but Doctor Flinn, on examining the sprained ankle, maintained his first decree.

"Do not trouble about us, Ellen, my dear," said Miss Lavinia, "we shall go back to O'Lally's Town, and do without you for a few days."

"I suppose you must," disconsolately replied Miss Ellen; "but what a pity dear Emily is away!"

But though the return to O'Lally's Town was perforce agreed upon, Mr. O'Lally could not accompany the two ladies, for Doctor Flinn informed him that he was wanted on important business a few miles hence.

"I am sure Miss Ford and Miss Winter will excuse our brother," pleaded Miss Ellen.

"Indeed we will," replied Miss Lavinia, nervously; "Michael shall see us home."

"But why run away?" asked Miss Flinn; "there is room for you here."

Doctor Flinn seconded the hospitable invitation; but Miss Lavinia felt shy and uncomfortable in this strange house, and was even in some hurry to leave it. Michael saw them home, as had been agreed; and thus unpleasantly ended the excursion to Shane's Cascade.

"I feel very miserable," said Miss Lavinia, when they reached O'Lally's Town. "That open grave is haunting me. I know you did not mean it, but it was very unfortunate you skipped among those rocks; and I wish, I really did, we had never come to Ireland. My head aches so, that it is quite distracting."

Mab advised her aunt to go to bed. But Miss Lavinia could not make up her mind to move. She sat disconsolately in the large sitting-room below, saying her head ached, and lamenting her troubles, but she did not stir. Mab again advised repose; and, after some hesitation, Miss Lavinia complied with the advice. But when she was upstairs and in bed, she could not rest. She heard noises below, she said, and she bade Mab go down and see if Mr. O'Lally were coming.

Mab resisted, but her aunt's restlessness increased, and she at length yielded. She went downstairs, and, leaving the house, walked down to the shore. The day was well-nigh spent; the sky was clear and blue, and the sun was bending towards the farthest edge of the vast green sea. Softly, almost languidly, the waves met the yellow sand of the beach, and rolled back again to their mighty bed. Heavenly peace filled heaven and earth, and Mab's heart felt ready to break. Far as she might look she could see no token of his coming; but he would come, not merely this evening, but again and again. He had said with-in her hearing that he would never leave O'Lally's Town. This region was his home for ever. Those wild heathy mountains, that solitary shore and broad ocean, would meet his gaze for days

and years to come. Mab thought them as blest as she was miserable. Separation, speedy and irrevocable, lay before her; and beyond that again a future so desolate, that she shrank to contemplate it. Oh! if escape were but possible; if she were but beloved and free to love, what a happy destiny to live in that wild Irish nook, and never leave it! The sullen Atlantic might shut her out from other lands—mountain and heath might enclose her home—it would still be home, and be blest.

Mr. O'Lally had not appeared, and the red round sun was sinking, short of rays, a ball of fire, in the deepening blue of the sea. Mab turned back towards the house, and went up to her aunt's room.

"Is he coming?" eagerly asked Miss Lavinia.

"No, aunt; I did not even get a sight of him."

"I wish he would come—don't you think you hear him below?"

"No, aunt; you hear the servants."

"You always are so sure of everything! Now, I feel certain that Mr. O'Lally will come in unawares, and that you will miss him, and I shall not know how Ellen is."

"I shall leave a message with the servants, aunt."

"There it is again! You are always for leaving it to the servants, as if they ever minded those things! Now, what is to prevent you from sitting down below, and waiting for Mr. O'Lally yourself. That way I shall be sure that you cannot miss him."

Mab was surprised at her aunt's pertinacity, and attempted to resist it; but she only made Miss Ford uncomfortable and restless, and after a while she yielded and went downstairs.

Very large and lonely seemed the vacant sitting-room to Mab. The lamp on the table shed a white circle of light, beyond which all was vague darkness. The evening was still, the wind moaned around the old house, and Mab felt both superstitious and unhappy. The thoughts which had haunted her on the seashore were not with her then: passion was mute, and vain wishes had fled. No, as Mab looked round that solitary room—as she remembered Miss Emily's illness, and thought of the disasters of the day, she wondered if her aunt's presentiments were visionary, or only too real. "Is there some evil fortune attending me?" she asked of herself, with some bitterness; "must I bring trouble and grief to every one connected with Mr. O'Lally—and shall I perhaps end with him?"

She tried to banish the thought. She took up a book that lay on the table, and attempted to read. It was Froissart, brought

and left there by Mr. O'Lally. But chivalry had lost her charms—neither knightly deed nor lady-love could make Mab forget that ill-fated day. Besides, the deep, unearthly stillness of the house haunted her. She longed to hear a voice, a step, a closing or an opening door. Her wish was gratified; a loud ring announced Mr. O'Lally's return; the house grew alive with sounds; the door was opened, and, in a few minutes, he entered the sitting-room, attracted by the light he saw burning there.

Mab was bending over her book—her cheek lay on her hand—her elbow rested on the table—her face was so bent that Mr. O'Lally could not see it; he could only see the gentle outlines of her clear forehead, and the thick waves of her golden hair.

"Yes," he thought, as the temptation rose before him in all its sweetness, "it would be very pleasant to have her here waiting for me evening after evening; to get her welcome after the long anxious watch, the weary longing for my return; it would be very pleasant, but *cui bono*—when, even if she would, I would not."

Perhaps his countenance expressed more than he guessed of those feelings, for Mab rose and inquired after Miss Ellen, with a flush on her cheek.

"His sister was well," he said, "and would soon return." He stood between Mab and the door, and he did not let her pass at once.

"Miss Winter," he said, "you must often think me rude. Excuse me—it is involuntary. But you know, for others have told you, how great is the likeness you bear to Miss O'Flaherty. She was our neighbour, and we knew her well."

"Is the likeness so great?" asked Mab, with a smile of some scorn.

"Wonderful! And yet," he added, bending his eyes on her face, "what a difference!"

Mab could not help understanding the meaning of that look. It expressed admiration—no more, perhaps—but it expressed that, respectful and courteous—such as he could give, and she could receive, but warm enough to make her heart beat, and her look fall before his.

"Mab!—Mab!" said an anxious voice on the staircase.

It was Miss Lavinia, who had risen, and was calling her niece in querulous tones. Blushing and ashamed at having lingered so long, Mab left the room, without giving Mr. O'Lally another look. He closed the door after her, and, as he did so, he could not help hearing Miss Lavinia say, pettishly,

"What can you have been doing there with Mr. O'Lally all this time?"

"This will never do," he thought, vexed with his own weakness. He took up Froissart, but no more than Mab could he read; Mab's rosy face ever floated between him and the black-letter page—a vision of loveliness and youth. He remembered the girlish voice, he saw the golden hair, he felt the charm of the wayward ways—now sweet as honey, now petulant and wilful as a child's—and he almost wished he were less master of his own passions.

"A weaker man would love, and probably win her," he thought; "why must not I?"

The answer came prompt and clear: he was strong, and must pay the noble cost of strength—self-subjection. Judgment did not approve this passion.

"And it shall not prevail," thought Mr. O'Lally, again taking up Froissart.

Boast not too much, nor yet too soon—you are strong, it is true, but remember that even the strong have their hours of weakness.

CHAPTER IX.

THERE was not for miles around a pleasanter and more comfortable parlour than Miss Flinn's. She took great pride in it, and in its oak-paneled walls, dark and glossy, set off by the gay flowers of the carpet and the crimson damask chairs. The prospect which the broad window of this parlour commanded was part of its beauty, in Miss Flinn's opinion. It was both bright and romantic, for it began with a garden full of flowers and ended with a horizon of purple hills. By that window the three-fourths of Miss Flinn's life were spent. Here she sewed, and here she read her favourite books, and "fed her mind through her eyes," as she said herself; and here, conceiving that sun and air were the best panacea for a sprained ankle, she had Miss Ellen brought down and laid on a couch, to which she generously surrendered the whole window.

On this couch, therefore, and in this parlour, Miss Ellen was lying contentedly enough the day that followed the unlucky excursion to Shane's Cascade, when her happy, or at least resigned, mood was broken by her perverse hostess. They were alone, it

was long past noon, but the day was still warm and bright, when, suddenly putting down her work, Miss Flinn exclaimed,

"What a pretty girl Miss Winter is! So fair and rosy; and how much that brother of yours seems to admire her!"

"God forbid!" emphatically exclaimed Mr. O'Lally's sister. Miss Flinn laughed.

"Why, where's the harm?" she asked.

"It would break Emily's heart. Indeed it would, Miss Flinn."

"Not a bit of it, Miss Nelly. Why should it? A man may think a girl pretty and stop there."

"Ah! but if our brother did not stop there?—and yet you are right enough. He is an O'Lally, and he would never do it."

"Well, thank heaven," said Miss Flinn, with great philosophy, "I am Bridget Flinn, and my brother says ours is a great family—but, thank heaven, I say again, *I* never cared one pin about it. Men and women are what God made them, Miss Nelly, and the rest is but miserable nonsense—O'Lally and all."

Miss Flinn was privileged, yet Miss Ellen winced under so heretical a speech.

"I value your brother more for being what he is," continued Miss Flinn, "than for his blood; besides, you know, Miss Ellen, some people say his father could scarcely have proved his descent."

"Then indeed, and indeed, they speak falsely!" angrily interrupted Miss Ellen; "and it is well Emily does not hear you. But there never was a truer O'Lally than our brother."

"He is better than an O'Lally," persisted the obstinate Miss Flinn; "he is a remarkable man, and on a broader field he would have been a great one. He used to lead my brother, Dr. Flinn, by the nose, and Doctor Flinn still swears by him. Don't I know how he got round that obstinate old Briggs, and can't I remember how he used to get round me as a boy, when it was all 'Miss Flinn,' and 'Biddy, my dear?' I tell you he was born to rule men and to wheedle women, and it is a mercy he uses the latter part of his power so little."

"Our brother is a man of principle," proudly said Miss Ellen.

"Very true," nodded Miss Flinn; "and yet I am not sure there is no mischief brewing between him and that rosy little Miss Winter."

"Do not say that, for God's sake!" agitatedly cried Miss Ellen, clasping her hands; "think of Annie—dear Annie Gardiner, who adores him!"

"Then, dear Annie is a fool," drily said Miss Flinn; "for he does not adore her. Why should he? No—no, Miss Gardiner cannot stand by Miss Winter—it is out of the question."

Miss Ellen looked sorely distressed. Miss Flinn pitilessly continued:

"I confess I never liked that Annie. She is self-opinionated, and keeps her sweetness for the men—always a bad sign. You think she loves you—bless you, it is all for your brother! Has she a woman for her friend?—Not one—and she wants none—she has no heart."

"I am sure she is fond of us," stoutly said Miss Ellen.

Miss Flinn shook her head and said again,

"I am sure she ought to be; but what is your objection to that pretty little Miss Winter?"

"She is a foundling, and she is poor."

"There it is!—birth and money. Well, watch her close, then; for, unless I am mistaken, she is distractedly fond of your brother."

"And he!—he!" gasped Miss Ellen, thoroughly frightened.

"I don't think him quite safe."

Again Miss Ellen clasped her hands in unutterable dismay.

"The deceitful little creature!" she cried; "the little cheat!"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Miss Flinn. "It is you, dear Miss Nelly, you and Miss Emily, who have acted like a pair of geese. What! you have got an irresistible brother, handsome and fascinating, and you ask a young and pretty girl to your house! I would not trust any man—not even Doctor Flinn—with a plain one."

"But Annie is handsome, and he does not care for her," pitiously said Miss Nelly.

"The very reason why he should care for another, and especially for a newer one. He has known Miss Gardiner all his life, and she is monotonous; Miss Winter is not."

"What shall I do?" moaned Miss Ellen; "he is alone in the house with her, and I am kept here for ever so long."

"Don't fidget. I am pretty sure her aunt, who is not smitten with Mr. O'Lally, will watch her close enough. She scarce-

ly took her eyes off of her yesterday. I have a strong fancy that she is saving up Mab, as she calls her, for that nephew of hers who is in Australia, as you told me."

Miss Ellen brightened up at the idea.

"I wish she would," she said eagerly, "it would be just the thing. Now, suppose I were to write a little friendly note to Miss Lavinia, about her health and all that, and end with a post-script about her nephew and Miss Winter, and what a desirable thing it would be."

Miss Flinn's work, which she had resumed, dropped on her lap, and her look fell with deep compassion on Miss Ellen's reclining figure.

"Simple you were born and simple you will die," she said, in a tone of contemptuous pity; "there is no putting it into you. Miss Emily is keener; but her head is not quite right either. A poor set!—a poor lot!"

Miss Ellen was not quite so much annoyed as disappointed to find her scheme thus rejected; but though she did not persist in it, a little reflection convincing her it was rather too transparent, she hit on another plan, which, lest it should be ruthlessly demolished by Miss Flinn, she did not impart to that lady, for which she patiently awaited her brother's arrival. He came early. Miss Flinn welcomed him with the cordial friendship and open admiration which he ever received from that frank lady.

"I should have liked such a brother as you, Mr. O'Lally," she said, as he sat by his sister, and bent with caressing tenderness over her reclining face; "a brother like you is better and more convenient than a lover: in the first place, he lasts longer; in the second he is not so troublesome."

Mr. O'Lally raised his laughing blue eyes, and looked with a smile at Miss Flinn.

"What is your objection to Doctor Flinn?"

"Now, don't be conceited, Mr. O'Lally. Doctor Flinn is fully as good as you are, and wears admirably, and I would not change a hair of his head; but for all that, I should have liked a brother like you—young, handsome, gay and brilliant, and especially fond of me. A brother who would come in with a smile and a kiss, who would buy me becoming dresses, and whom I, being older and graver, could pet and indulge. Now, you know there is no petting Doctor Flinn."

"Pet me, Miss Flinn," said Mr. O'Lally, with a light laugh.

"Yes, laugh away at old Miss Flinn," she answered with a half sigh; "you have your own sisters, and I have been talking

nonsense, as I always do when you are here; but indeed, Mr. O'Lally——"

Here Miss Flinn was interrupted by a servant, who mysteriously informed her that she was wanted; upon which she rose, and rather hastily left the room.

"I wonder what Doctor Flinn thinks of that," said Mr. O'Lally, as the door closed upon her.

"Surely Doctor Flinn is not jealous."

"You do not suppose I am thinking of the nonsense with which Miss Flinn has been gratifying us? No—I mean the errand on which she has been summoned."

Miss Ellen looked puzzled.

"Why, Nelly, don't you know Miss Flinn prescribes on her own account, and that she has actually cured a child her brother had given up! Woe betide her when Doctor Flinn learns that this is not a chance success, but part of a system—of a regular competition for skill and empire."

"Miss Flinn is a very daring woman!" said Miss Ellen, amazed; "how can she run such a risk?"

"How, indeed!" laughingly replied Mr. O'Lally; "I wish, though, she would cure and give me back my sister."

"Oh! I am getting better. Tell Lavinia so. I thought I should see her this morning."

"Miss Ford had a bad headache last night. So at least Miss Winter told me."

On hearing Mab's name, Miss Ellen could scarce disguise her uneasiness; and eagerly plunged into the subject uppermost in her thoughts.

"By the way," she exclaimed, "how is Miss Winter?"

"Well, I believe."

"Do you know," resumed Miss Ellen, with her most serious look, "I have been thinking how well she would do for Miss Flinn's cousin—James Flinn."

Mr. O'Lally laughed outright.

"What makes you so matrimonial to-day, Nelly?" he asked. "Now, tell the truth—it is not about either James Flinn, or Miss Winter, you are troubling yourself—but about your brother."

"My dear brother, I hope you are not vexed," said Miss Ellen, much disconcerted; "it is all Miss Flinn's doings. She would have it that you and Miss Winter were distractedly—no, I mean that you—that Mab"—in her confusion Miss Ellen thought it the wisest plan to stop short and say no more.

Mr. O'Lally's pale face flushed; it might be with displeasure,

it might be with another feeling, but he said, composedly enough :

"Miss Flinn is apt to imagine strange things. Good-bye, Nelly, God bless you!"

He stooped, and kissed her.

"There is a storm coming on," said Miss Ellen, glancing uneasily at the sky, which bent dark and threatening above the purple mountains; "wait until it is over."

"I shall get home before it breaks."

Mr. O'Lally's will was law; his sister did not dare to insist any further. He passed through the garden to leave the house, and leaning against the low wooden gate, he found Miss Flinn, who had just parted from a poor woman. He lightly laid his hand on her shoulder, and looked laughingly in her brown face :

"How is your patient?" he asked.

She could not repress a little start, but scorning to betray her secret annoyance, she said, calmly :

"My patients always do well, Mr. O'Lally; for when I cannot cure, I let them alone."

"Not always; what have you been saying to Nelly?"

"What has she told you?" cautiously asked Miss Flinn.

He would not answer. They exchanged a quick, half-jesting, half-mistrustful look.

"The wise woman!" said Miss Flinn, with a reproving shake of the head; "I ought to have known her better."

"Say you ought to have known me better, Miss Biddy."

Miss Biddy raised her hand, and shaded her eyes. She looked deep into his, and smiled.

"Go your ways," she said; "go your ways. You are not the first man whose pride has had a fall, Mr. O'Lally."

"Now what does that speech deserve?"

"Pay me out the next time you come—that is to say, if you can."

Mr. O'Lally was struck with her earnestness and became suddenly grave.

"Miss Flinn," he said, knitting his arched eyebrows with the most serious look, "speak frankly: have you noticed in my behaviour to that young girl—who is and must ever be a stranger to me—anything which the nicest honour could question?"

"No, and indeed no!" warmly replied Miss Flinn; "but——"

"But," he repeated after her.

"But you admire her, of course."

He was silent.

"Well, then, take care—that is all."

Mr. O'Lally turned away with a smile, both careless and secure.

Little did Mr. O'Lally care for Miss Flinn's boasting, or for her warning, but his sister's broken words haunted him; yes—he, too, had suspected Mab's preference, but suspicion had never ripened into certainty. And yet it might be. He might be loved by that proud heart, which knew so well how to put on the garb of aversion. He was sure of Annie's affection, and it did not move him; but the thought of Mab's, which he still doubted, stirred his blood, and thrilled through his very heart.

He stopped short, surprised and indignant at the sway this thought held over him. "You have never been conquered yet," said pride; "will you be conquered now? Shall a girl's face prevail over your settled will, and that, too, when fortune's darkest frowns warn you that evil is at hand?" But as he walked on, another and a softer voice replied—"It is not a girl's face that has won you. Beauty is a flower that grows on many a tree; but if you care for that blossom only, it is that its sweetness mates best with your sense. Her very faults and errors are more congenial to you than the virtues of others. Be wise; love has its day, and—alas! it has but one."

But when was man's ambition conquered by the pleadings of this speaker? Mr. O'Lally frowned, and set his heart, as he remembered who and what Mab was. He might have forgotten easily that she was poor, for though he knew the value of money, he was not mercenary; but he could not—and he would not forget, that to marry her as matters stood with him now, might be the loss of his trembling *prestige*, the ruin of his last hopes. He would not give his enemies that hold over him—no; come what would, they should not taunt this would-be regenerator—as a love-sick youth, ready to cast all his pride at the feet of a nameless of a worse than nameless girl! Later, when he was strong, when their necks were broken to the yoke, he might prove his power, and their submission, by setting Mab above them all; but now he would keep his own counsel, and bide his time.

"Alas! it may be too late when you are strong," whispered pleadingly the softer voice, which had already spoken; "remember that time is not man's, that it belongs to God alone."

Well, it would be hard to lose her. Mr. O'Lally confessed it to himself; it would be hard to learn that Mab had become another man's wife; but still he could bear it, for he was strong, and the strong who rule this world rule their own hearts first of

all. In this mood he walked on, defiant of fate and love, as of the storm that brooded in the sullen sky before him. A black rim met the purple plain where the mountains did not break the horizon; all nature was quiet, silent, and threatening.

At length the thunder woke; lightning flashed across the sky; large drops of rain began to fall. In a few minutes he was wet through. O'Lally's Town was within sight, but it was too late to speed on; and Mr. O'Lally, without hurrying, walked leisurely by the shore, watching the sea-birds swooping above the waves for their prey, as the hawk hovers above fields of corn! "Everywhere the weak are the prey of the strong," he thought; "everywhere the same pitiless law of remorseless strength prevails."

His eyes were bent; a light sound made him raise them: he stopped with some surprise, for a woman's figure had suddenly crossed his path. She threw back the hood of her cloak, and it disclosed Mab's features. She looked wild and pale, and her drenched garments showed she had been out in all the rain.

"What has happened?" cried Mr. O'Lally; "but wait, first come here." He seized her hand and led her swiftly to a projection of the rocks; it gave a shelter which the slanting rain could not reach, and which screened them both. He had not released Mab's hand, and it felt cold as ice, and shook in his clasp like an aspen leaf.

"What is it?" he said again.

"My aunt is ill," replied Mab, faintly.

"Then I shall go myself for Doctor Flinn."

Mab stretched out the hand he had dropped and detained him.

"Doctor Flinn has been; he called to tell us how Miss Ellen was going on."

"Then what brings you out, Miss Winter?" asked Mr. O'Lally.

Mab gasped for breath, but tightening her hands on her bosom, she said, with sufficient firmness:

"I came to meet you, Mr. O'Lally. My aunt sent me," she added; "Doctor Flinn acknowledged to her that he dreaded a contagious fever, and to me that, if so, that fever was—Typhus."

"I am sorry to hear it," replied Mr. O'Lally. "Let us go in."

Mab's calmness forsook her at once.

"You must not enter the house—you must not!" she cried. "Whatever happens, you must not suffer."

Mr. O'Lally bent his keen eyes on her face. He felt a strange wish to try and torment her—to make her break through every restraint of shame and pride, and know if Miss Flinn had spoken truly.

"Surely, Miss Winter," he said, half smiling, "you would not have me shrink from a personal danger, and forsake my sister's guest in my sister's house."

"But it will serve no end. Oh! be persuaded," she implored. "Remember how fatal we have been to you and yours. One sister, the day I arrived, the other yesterday, suffered through me. Do not, I entreat, add to that load of remorse and grief, what would be beyond it all. Out of pity to them—to us—do not—do not!"

Mr. O'Lally, still looking at Mab, did not answer. She thought he was yielding, and renewed her entreaties with greater ardour.

"Do not," she said; "common prudence forbids it. You must yield for the sake of your sisters—you must."

"I cannot," said Mr. O'Lally, gently, but firmly.

"You will not!" she cried, distractedly.

"I cannot."

Before he could guess her intention, Mab had sunk on the ground at his feet.

"I will not rise," she cried, in a voice full of anguish, "until you have yielded. God help me if you do not, if to the trouble and the grief I have already inflicted on your sisters, I add *your* danger—if I help to destroy you, their darling, their life, and their pride. Oh! Mr. O'Lally, have mercy upon me—if you have none on yourself—save me from that pang and that agony."

Her hands clasped his garments with nervous emotion, her upraised eyes sought his with an imploring gaze—her looks, her face, breathed entreaty and despair, and something more than she knew, something which Mr. O'Lally read there with tumultuous emotion.

Never had love and pride quaffed so deep a draught of content in Mr. O'Lally's heart as they did then. Mab was no more the dangerous likeness of a dead love, which had proved weak and faithless—she was herself, the proud and perverse young beauty, whom he had neither courted nor sought to win, and who had poured upon him the full tide of her indifference and her scorn. And now she was kneeling, kneeling to him and praying, her long guarded secret in her face! With all his self-control and strength Mr. O'Lally was an imaginative man—he

was also a man of quick passions, which he had never indulged. The conviction of Mab's desperate love for him passed like flame through his whole being; he forgot her nameless birth, and its shame, he only remembered her loveliness and her youth. He gave himself no time for thought or reflection. His face burned with triumph and joy, and, raising Mab, he looked at her, flushed and ardent.

Her secret was gone; it was hers, still, that very morning, and now it was gone for ever, and in the power of the last being that should have known it. A moan of despair passed her lips, and, hiding her burning face in her hands, she stood mute and weeping before him.

He first broke silence.

"Mary, for God's sake speak!—Miss Winter, I mean—no, Mary, my second Mary, better, dearer, far, than the first, speak to me—I know you love me, but tell me it is true."

He removed her hands from her face, but Mab was too much frightened at his tone to raise her downcast eyes.

"Look at me," he entreated—"at least look at me."

Mab had never thought to be thus spoken to by him, in a tone so suppliant and so tender. Her heart beat so fast that she could scarcely breathe—she felt overpowered with happiness and joy. She, too, forgot—she forgot the past and its ties, the present and its cares—she only felt beloved, and looked up to read in his face the same story he had read in hers.

There was a transport in that first moment which made both forget all else in life, as they had already forgotten the thunder and the storm in the sky above. Mab was the first to waken from the dream of delight; she thought of Robert, and remembered her bonds with mingled terror and abhorrence.

"God help me!" she said.

Mr. O'Lally looked down at her with a fond smile.

"The storm will soon be over," he said.

The storm, indeed! Mab looked up at the sky, sullen and black, with forked lightning passing through it, and every cloud pregnant with a thunderclap; and what were the storms of the elements—what was their wildest fury—to the misery of her aching heart? And yet, what strange happiness blended with all her woe—how troubled a joy mingled with despair!

"God help me!" she said again.

He thought she feared for him—feared the danger at O'Lally's Town.

"Be not afraid," he said, fondly drawing her towards him,

"nothing can happen to either of us—we are safe from all harm."

"Oh! if one could only die!" thought Mab, letting her head sink against his shoulder; "if that could be the end of it."

But life—terrible life—its duties and its hateful bonds—were all before her.

"The rain has ceased," said Mr. O'Lally; "you are wet, very wet, I am afraid. We must make our way to O'Lally's Town—that dull O'Lally's Town," he added, half-smiling.

Mab knew all he meant—that home which she had slighted in her pride, was now to be hers, at least in his thoughts, because it was his. He dreamed of no separation—of nothing that could divide them.

"Have mercy on me!" she said, faintly.

Mr. O'Lally looked amazed and doubtful.

"I surely have not offended you?" he said.

"Oh, no!—offended me!—oh, no! But still have pity on me."

Her meaning became more obscure, yet it was plain something troubled her.

Mr. O'Lally bent on her a look that seemed to read her very soul.

"You love me," he said, quietly; "I have not been deceived—I am sure of it—then, what is it?"

Here was the time for rescue, for a full confession, or for denial. Now, could Mab have told him all, or declared that he had been deceived—that she did not love him, loved another, to whom she was bound in honour? But neither that sickening acknowledgment nor that falsehood could be uttered—but one truth broke from her lips, strong and triumphant.

"No," she said, with the energy of despair, "no, you have not been mistaken. I do love you with my whole heart and soul—better than life a thousand times—but—but—for all that, have mercy on me!"

Her words now bore but one meaning in his ear—his danger. He smiled, and pressing her to his heart, with a sudden transport, wakened by a confession so daring and so tender, he said, fervently,

"If I had not loved you before I must love you now! The world holds not another girl like you—not one—not one!"

Mab's head sank on her bosom—her courage failed her. She heard his words of love and fondness, she submitted to his tenderness with a sort of apathy.

"Perhaps it is I shall die of aunty's fever," she thought, with something like hope; and no longer resisting his entreaties, she allowed him to assist her over to the road, where the sand had drunk in the rain.

The sky was clear, the sun shone on the sea, the storm was over, and Mr. O'Lally's eyes danced with delight.

Mab, too, was happy; her resolve was taken. She had stifled the last cry of conscience—she would be his wife, no matter at what cost.

"Robert will survive my loss," she thought; "besides, who knows, perhaps I shall die of aunty's fever."

Oh! if he could have read the meaning of that strange look of love and woe she cast upon him as they crossed the threshold of O'Lally's Town, what a wakening there would have been in his heart.

CHAPTER X.

"How long you have been gone!" moaned Miss Lavinia, when Mab softly entered the room.

Mab looked at the watch on the toilet-table.

"Only three-quarters of an hour, aunt." And she thought, as she said it,

"My whole life changed in three-quarters of an hour!"

"It seemed very long," sighed Miss Lavinia, turning restlessly in her bed; "why did you go out?"

"To meet Mr. O'Lally, aunt."

"Mab, it is odd. Why should you go and meet Mr. O'Lally?—it is very odd!"

Mab did not answer. It was at her aunt's request that she had gone, and it was useless to argue with her, ill as she was.

"I am afraid," pursued Miss Lavinia, "I really am, that you like Mr. O'Lally too much."

"Aunt!" cried Mab, much startled.

"I thought so from the first," resumed Miss Lavinia, in a heavy tone. "You looked at each other in such a strange way on that first evening, it was quite odd. When he was not looking at you, you were looking at him, and so on—it was quite tiresome."

Alas! all that Mab felt on hearing this was, "He loved me from the first, then!" Memory rapidly went over the last few days, and carefully gleaned every token. Ay, Miss Lavinia

"Do not say that, for God's sake!" agitatedly cried Miss Ellen, clasping her hands; "think of Annie—dear Annie Gardiner, who adores him!"

"Then, dear Annie is a fool," drily said Miss Flinn; "for he does not adore her. Why should he? No—no, Miss Gardiner cannot stand by Miss Winter—it is out of the question."

Miss Ellen looked sorely distressed. Miss Flinn pitilessly continued:

"I confess I never liked that Annie. She is self-opinionated, and keeps her sweetness for the men—always a bad sign. You think she loves you—bless you, it is all for your brother! Has she a woman for her friend?—Not one—and she wants none—she has no heart."

"I am sure she is fond of us," stoutly said Miss Ellen.

Miss Flinn shook her head and said again,

"I am sure she ought to be; but what is your objection to that pretty little Miss Winter?"

"She is a foundling, and she is poor."

"There it is!—birth and money. Well, watch her close, then; for, unless I am mistaken, she is distractedly fond of your brother."

"And he!—he!" gasped Miss Ellen, thoroughly frightened.

"I don't think him quite safe."

Again Miss Ellen clasped her hands in unutterable dismay.

"The deceitful little creature!" she cried; "the little cheat!"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Miss Flinn. "It is you, dear Miss Nelly, you and Miss Emily, who have acted like a pair of geese. What! you have got an irresistible brother, handsome and fascinating, and you ask a young and pretty girl to your house! I would not trust any man—not even Doctor Flinn—with a plain one."

"But Annie is handsome, and he does not care for her," pitilessly said Miss Nelly.

"The very reason why he should care for another, and especially for a newer one. He has known Miss Gardiner all his life, and she is monotonous; Miss Winter is not."

"What shall I do?" moaned Miss Ellen; "he is alone in the house with her, and I am kept here for ever so long."

"Don't fidget. I am pretty sure her aunt, who is not smitten with Mr. O'Lally, will watch her close enough. She scarce

ly took her eyes off of her yesterday. I have a strong fancy that she is saving up Mab, as she calls her, for that nephew of hers who is in Australia, as you told me."

Miss Ellen brightened up at the idea.

"I wish she would," she said eagerly, "it would be just the thing. Now, suppose I were to write a little friendly note to Miss Lavinia, about her health and all that, and end with a postscript about her nephew and Miss Winter, and what a desirable thing it would be."

Miss Flinn's work, which she had resumed, dropped on her lap, and her look fell with deep compassion on Miss Ellen's reclining figure.

"Simple you were born and simple you will die," she said, in a tone of contemptuous pity; "there is no putting it into you. Miss Emily is keener; but her head is not quite right either. A poor set!—a poor lot!"

Miss Ellen was not quite so much annoyed as disappointed to find her scheme thus rejected; but though she did not persist in it, a little reflection convincing her it was rather too transparent, she hit on another plan, which, lest it should be ruthlessly demolished by Miss Flinn, she did not impart to that lady, for which she patiently awaited her brother's arrival. He came early. Miss Flinn welcomed him with the cordial friendship and open admiration which he ever received from that frank lady.

"I should have liked such a brother as you, Mr. O'Lally," she said, as he sat by his sister, and bent with caressing tenderness over her reclining face; "a brother like you is better and more convenient than a lover: in the first place, he lasts longer; in the second he is not so troublesome."

Mr. O'Lally raised his laughing blue eyes, and looked with a smile at Miss Flinn.

"What is your objection to Doctor Flinn?"

"Now, don't be conceited, Mr. O'Lally. Doctor Flinn is fully as good as you are, and wears admirably, and I would not change a hair of his head; but for all that, I should have liked a brother like you—young, handsome, gay and brilliant, and especially fond of me. A brother who would come in with a smile and a kiss, who would buy me becoming dresses, and whom I, being older and graver, could pet and indulge. Now, you know there is no petting Doctor Flinn."

"Pet me, Miss Flinn," said Mr. O'Lally, with a light laugh.

"Yes, laugh away at old Miss Flinn," she answered with a half sigh; "you have your own sisters, and I have been talking

nonsense, as I always do when you are here; but indeed, Mr. O'Lally——"

Here Miss Flinn was interrupted by a servant, who mysteriously informed her that she was wanted; upon which she rose, and rather hastily left the room.

"I wonder what Doctor Flinn thinks of that," said Mr. O'Lally, as the door closed upon her.

"Surely Doctor Flinn is not jealous."

"You do not suppose I am thinking of the nonsense with which Miss Flinn has been gratifying us? No—I mean the errand on which she has been summoned."

Miss Ellen looked puzzled.

"Why, Nelly, don't you know Miss Flinn prescribes on her own account, and that she has actually cured a child her brother had given up! Woe betide her when Doctor Flinn learns that this is not a chance success, but part of a system—of a regular competition for skill and empire."

"Miss Flinn is a very daring woman!" said Miss Ellen, amazed; "how can she run such a risk?"

"How, indeed!" laughingly replied Mr. O'Lally; "I wish, though, she would cure and give me back my sister."

"Oh! I am getting better. Tell Lavinia so. I thought I should see her this morning."

"Miss Ford had a bad headache last night. So at least Miss Winter told me."

On hearing Mab's name, Miss Ellen could scarce disguise her uneasiness; and eagerly plunged into the subject uppermost in her thoughts.

"By the way," she exclaimed, "how is Miss Winter?"

"Well, I believe."

"Do you know," resumed Miss Ellen, with her most serious look, "I have been thinking how well she would do for Miss Flinn's cousin—James Flinn."

Mr. O'Lally laughed outright.

"What makes you so matrimonial to-day, Nelly?" he asked.

"Now, tell the truth—it is not about either James Flinn, or Miss Winter, you are troubling yourself—but about your brother."

"My dear brother, I hope you are not vexed," said Miss Ellen, much disconcerted; "it is all Miss Flinn's doings. She would have it that you and Miss Winter were distractedly—no, I mean that you—that Mab"—in her confusion Miss Ellen thought it the wisest plan to stop short and say no more.

Mr. O'Lally's pale face flushed; it might be with displeasure,

it might be with another feeling, but he said, composedly enough:

"Miss Flinn is apt to imagine strange things. Good-bye, Nelly, God bless you!"

He stooped, and kissed her.

"There is a storm coming on," said Miss Ellen, glancing uneasily at the sky, which bent dark and threatening above the purple mountains; "wait until it is over."

"I shall get home before it breaks."

Mr. O'Lally's will was law; his sister did not dare to insist any further. He passed through the garden to leave the house, and leaning against the low wooden gate, he found Miss Flinn, who had just parted from a poor woman. He lightly laid his hand on her shoulder, and looked laughingly in her brown face:

"How is your patient?" he asked.

She could not repress a little start, but scorning to betray her secret annoyance, she said, calmly:

"My patients always do well, Mr. O'Lally; for when I cannot cure, I let them alone."

"Not always; what have you been saying to Nelly?"

"What has she told you?" cautiously asked Miss Flinn.

He would not answer. They exchanged a quick, half-jesting, half-mistrustful look.

"The wise woman!" said Miss Flinn, with a reproving shake of the head; "I ought to have known her better."

"Say you ought to have known me better, Miss Biddy."

Miss Biddy raised her hand, and shaded her eyes. She looked deep into his, and smiled.

"Go your ways," she said; "go your ways. You are not the first man whose pride has had a fall, Mr. O'Lally."

"Now what does that speech deserve?"

"Pay me out the next time you come—that is to say, if you can."

Mr. O'Lally was struck with her earnestness and became suddenly grave.

"Miss Flinn," he said, knitting his arched eyebrows with the most serious look, "speak frankly: have you noticed in my behaviour to that young girl—who is and must ever be a stranger to me—anything which the nicest honour could question?"

"No, and indeed no!" warmly replied Miss Flinn; "but——"

"But," he repeated after her.

"But you admire her, of course."

He was silent.

"Well, then, take care—that is all."

Mr. O'Lally turned away with a smile, both careless and secure.

Little did Mr. O'Lally care for Miss Flinn's boasting, or for her warning, but his sister's broken words haunted him; yes—he, too, had suspected Mab's preference, but suspicion had never ripened into certainty. And yet it might be. He might be loved by that proud heart, which knew so well how to put on the garb of aversion. He was sure of Annie's affection, and it did not move him; but the thought of Mab's, which he still doubted, stirred his blood, and thrilled through his very heart.

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Mr. O'Lally looked down at her with a fond smile.

"The storm will soon be over," he said.

The storm, indeed! Mab looked up at the sky, sullen and black, with forked lightning passing through it, and every cloud pregnant with a thunderclap; and what were the storms of the elements—what was their wildest fury—to the misery of her aching heart? And yet, what strange happiness blended with all her woe—how troubled a joy mingled with despair!

"God help me!" she said again.

He thought she feared for him—feared the danger at O'Lally's Town.

"Be not afraid," he said, fondly drawing her towards him,

"nothing can happen to either of us—we are safe from all harm."

"Oh! if one could only die!" thought Mab, letting her head sink against his shoulder; "if that could be the end of it."

But life—terrible life—its duties and its hateful bonds—were all before her.

"The rain has ceased," said Mr. O'Lally; "you are wet, very wet, I am afraid. We must make our way to O'Lally's Town—that dull O'Lally's Town," he added, half-smiling.

Mab knew all he meant—that home which she had slighted in her pride, was now to be hers, at least in his thoughts, because it was his. He dreamed of no separation—of nothing that could divide them.

"Have mercy on me!" she said, faintly.

Mr. O'Lally looked amazed and doubtful.

"I surely have not offended you?" he said.

"Oh, no!—offended me!—oh, no! But still have pity on me."

Her meaning became more obscure, yet it was plain something troubled her.

Mr. O'Lally bent on her a look that seemed to read her very soul.

"You love me," he said, quietly; "I have not been deceived—I am sure of it—then, what is it?"

Here was the time for rescue, for a full confession, or for denial. Now, could Mab have told him all, or declared that he had been deceived—that she did not love him, loved another, to whom she was bound in honour? But neither that sickening acknowledgment nor that falsehood could be uttered—but one truth broke from her lips, strong and triumphant.

"No," she said, with the energy of despair, "no, you have not been mistaken. I do love you with my whole heart and soul—better than life a thousand times—but—but—for all that, have mercy on me!"

Her words now bore but one meaning in his ear—his danger. He smiled, and pressing her to his heart, with a sudden transport, wakened by a confession so daring and so tender, he said, fervently,

"If I had not loved you before I must love you now! The world holds not another girl like you—not one—not one!"

Mab's head sank on her bosom—her courage failed her. She heard his words of love and fondness, she submitted to his tenderness with a sort of apathy.

"Perhaps it is I shall die of aunty's fever," she thought, with something like hope; and no longer resisting his entreaties, she allowed him to assist her over to the road, where the sand had drunk in the rain.

The sky was clear, the sun shone on the sea, the storm was over, and Mr. O'Lally's eyes danced with delight.

Mab, too, was happy; her resolve was taken. She had stifled the last cry of conscience—she would be his wife, no matter at what cost.

"Robert will survive my loss," she thought; "besides, who knows, perhaps I shall die of aunty's fever."

Oh! if he could have read the meaning of that strange look of love and woe she cast upon him as they crossed the threshold of O'Lally's Town, what a waking there would have been in his heart.

CHAPTER X.

"How long you have been gone!" moaned Miss Lavinia, when Mab softly entered the room.

Mab looked at the watch on the toilet-table.

"Only three-quarters of an hour, aunt." And she thought, as she said it,

"My whole life changed in three-quarters of an hour!"

"It seemed very long," sighed Miss Lavinia, turning restlessly in her bed; "why did you go out?"

"To meet Mr. O'Lally, aunt."

"Mab, it is odd. Why should you go and meet Mr. O'Lally?—it is very odd!"

Mab did not answer. It was at her aunt's request that she had gone, and it was useless to argue with her, ill as she was.

"I am afraid," pursued Miss Lavinia, "I really am, that you like Mr. O'Lally too much."

"Aunt!" cried Mab, much startled.

"I thought so from the first," resumed Miss Lavinia, in a heavy tone. "You looked at each other in such a strange way on that first evening, it was quite odd. When he was not looking at you, you were looking at him, and so on—it was quite tiresome."

Alas! all that Mab felt on hearing this was, "He loved me from the first, then!" Memory rapidly went over the last few days, and carefully gleaned every token. Ay, Miss Lavinia

spoke truly ; Mab could not doubt it, she had been beloved even in those early moments of their acquaintance, when he seemed so distant and so cold.

"I do not think, I really do not, that Robert would approve of it," continued Miss Lavinia ; " but you seem to me never to think of poor Robert now."

Mab turned red and pale. Her conscience smote her keenly, and yet, with all her remorse and shame, what deep joy it was to think of Mr. O'Lally ! And he loved her—she was sure of it. She had read it in his eyes, in language which no woman can doubt, and which his uprightness and proud honour rendered gospel truth. Why could she not tell Miss Lavinia ? But the shock of knowing her darling Robert betrayed for Mr. O'Lally, would be too great. Compelled by prudence to passive deceit, Mab silently sat down in a deep arm-chair by her aunt's bedside.

"Poor child," softly said Miss Lavinia, "how unkind I am, as if you did not love dear old Robert as much as I do!—but, you see, his last words were, 'Aunt! take care of Mab for me?'"

This unmerited praise was harder to bear than the too well-deserved reproaches. And long, feverish, and painful was the night, painful, yet inexpressibly sweet, for Mr. O'Lally sat in the next room, ready to come on her first call, and Mab knew it. Miss Ford long moaned with pain, then fell into a heavy torpor. Mab sat by her, giving her a drink now and then, till dawn broke in the sky. She then gently opened the window farthest from her aunt's bed, and refreshed her languid head with the cool morning air. The grey clouds softly melted away from the dappled sky, behind them shone pale gold, then burning red, then the sun rose, nature awoke, there was a sound of twittering birds, a murmur of all living creatures in the air, and Miss Lavinia's voice moaned drearily :

"Oh ! Mab, why are you always leaving me ? Who is that ?"

It was Honour, and, behind her, Doctor Flinn, and a middle-aged woman in black, a nurse, whom he had promised to bring to help Mab when he had called on the preceding day.

Miss Lavinia roused herself at once.

"Doctor Flinn," she said, "do you know, I think you were mistaken yesterday ; I really do not believe I have got a dangerous fever."

"I said contagious," corrected Doctor Flinn—"not dangerous, I hope."

"And I do not think there was any necessity to be frightened about Mr. O'Lally."

"I hope not," composedly answered Doctor Flinn. "And how are you to-day, ma'am?"

"This morning, you mean."

"This morning, quite right. How are you this morning, Miss Ford?"

"I want to leave Ireland," replied Miss Lavinia, with much energy; "I hate that open grave."

Doctor Flinn put a few questions, soothed Miss Lavinia, and, with kind words of encouragement to Mab, he withdrew.

"Perhaps I shall call in again this evening," he carelessly said at the door. Mab felt sure that he would; but she showed no uneasiness, and pressed him with no questions—it was useless, and her own forebodings were of the gloomiest. Unable to control her feelings, she allowed the nurse, who had already begun her duties, to attend on her aunt, and, going to the open window, she again looked out, and let her tears fall freely. Steps on the gravelled paths of the garden below roused her. She saw Mr. O'Lally and Doctor Flinn talking together, and Mr. O'Lally's face was full of concern. They parted, and he looked up and saw her. He smiled, beckoning her to come down: her whole heart flew towards him in fond obedience; at once she slipped out of the room, and, in a few seconds, she had joined him in the garden.

"What did Doctor Flinn say to you?" was her first breathless question.

"He acknowledged a mistake; Miss Ford has not got typhus, the symptoms have changed."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Mab, with fervent gratitude—"you are safe. Thank God!"

Mr. O'Lally smiled gently but sadly.

"Ah!" cried Mab, stopping short in the path along which he was leading her, "you have not told me all. Her illness is not contagious; but it is none the less fatal."

"Indeed, Dr. Flinn refused to answer my questions on this head; so pray be calm, and keep hope."

"He will not tell me the truth," thought Mab, looking at him wistfully; and she already knew Mr. O'Lally too well to attempt making him tell that which he had resolved not to reveal.

In silence they walked on, and reached the door that led to the sea-shore. Mr. O'Lally opened it, and made her cross the threshold, on which she paused hesitatingly.

"The sea air will revive you, and give you new strength," he said.

Mab yielded ; she felt weak, languid, wretched, and yet blest. She was in no mood to resist him ; to lay her life at his feet, and place her will in his hand, would have seemed to her the fulness of content in that moment. Mr. O'Lally did not take her far. He made her sit down amongst the rocks, and he sat down by her. The tide was out, and the sea lay far away ; a calm plain of blue meeting other azure fields of sky. Between them and the smooth ocean extended a low brown sweep of rock and weed, and shallow pools, and yellow sand—all mingling in one dun tint, and stretching out into the sea its broken outlines.

Mab looked languidly around her, and Mr. O'Lally looked at her. Their eyes met, and parted no more. Their hearts were full of love, tenderness, pity, and sorrow. Mr. O'Lally knew that Mab would soon be bereaved, and she knew that he knew it.

"What shall I do?" she exclaimed, aloud, "what shall I do?" She clasped her hands in her grief; he took her in his arms, and embraced her fondly.

"Hope for the best," he said; "and if the worst should come, remember that nothing in this world can divide us."

"Ah! tell me that again!" cried Mab; "I know it, but I want to know it better."

Again and again he told her what she could not be weary of hearing. With all her grief she felt happy. It was exceeding happiness to think that she should be his wife some day—that she should spend her life with him, and have a right never to leave him. The world might pass away, and perish around her; whilst that remained, there was happiness even in the midst of bitter sorrow.

A feverish, sweet, and yet inexpressibly sorrowful life did Mab lead for the next few days. Every night she sat up with her aunt, and every morning she met Mr. O'Lally on the sea-shore. Sometimes they walked along the sandy beach—oftener they sat in the rocks, on the shingle. They often spent thus an hour and more sitting side by side, and hand in hand, and not uttering one word. They never spoke of love when they did talk—there was no need, for they loved, and they knew it; besides, poor Mab's heart was laden with grief, and there was a line of care on Mr. O'Lally's broad forehead. Mab put no questions, but her wistful eyes read a story of disappointment and bitterness in his face, which she was quick to understand. She was convinced that his once resistless popularity was rapidly

declining, and that his power was no longer acknowledged. All the dearer—if he could be dearer—did he grow to her with that conviction, even as her love only deepened in her heart with her own sorrow.

On the morning of the fourth day, Doctor Flinn came as usual. His face brightened as he saw Miss Ford, who, to Mab, only seemed slightly better. He gave the young girl a nod, meant to convey volumes of hope; but Miss Ford was watching them, and Mab did not dare to follow him out and question him. She knew that Mr. O'Lally was waiting below, that he would waylay and cross-examine Doctor Flinn, and on him she relied.

As soon as she could do so, she slipped out of the sick-room. With a quick step, she ran down the garden path, and reached breathless the spot where he stood waiting. He turned round on hearing her; his face was bright and hopeful.

"Well!" cried Mab.

"Well," he said, gently, "can't you guess?"

She raised to him eyes so full of pure joy, of a joy that shed so bright a light over her whole face, that Mr. O'Lally was dazzled. He had seen her animated, proud, pale, and disdainful; he had seen her sweet and tender; but he had never seen her radiant, and the thought that he owned this bright young creature moved his very heart with love and pride. He took her two hands in his, and looked down in her face with an admiring smile, which, for once, Mab knew not how to read.

"I have not misunderstood you?" she cried alarmed.

"No—no," he quickly replied; "Doctor Flinn has hopes—and you may look, as you feel, happy."

"Very happy!" said Mab.

"Your affections are strong," he continued, still looking down at her keenly, "and the ties that bind you to your home are deep. Mab, can you leave them all for my sake?—ay, even if I leave Ireland—as I may."

Mab's lips quivered, for she thought of Mr. Ford, but she answered:

"I am yours, Mr. O'Lally, in life or in death. Where you go, I go—if you will have me."

"If I will have you!" he repeated after her. "Oh, Mab!—Mab!"

His look overflowed with passionate tenderness; he loved her, and he was proud of her love for him. This time Mab read his feelings, but she did not feel humbled: a boundless humility filled her heart—the humility of true affection.

"Are you going away, then?" she asked, a little timidly.

"I hope not. I am not conquered yet; but, if they could, how they would hunt me out of my home and land!"

His eye flashed, his lips quivered with resentment.

"We will not think of them," he added, taking her arm within his; "'sufficient to each day is the evil thereof.'"

He cleared his brow. He talked and laughed as lightly as if there were not a care on his mind; and Mab, in the fulness of her joy, laughed with him. They were young, both of them, and life and love were very sweet. They had left the garden; they were walking in the shadow of the cliff, and Mab stopped short, once or twice, to exclaim,

"Oh! I am too happy!"

"Too happy!" he repeated. "Oh, Mab, this is but the dawn of happiness—its noon is yet to come!"

"Better dawn than noon," quickly said Mab; "for after noon comes evening!"

"Never for us, save in the sense of time. The evening of love is for weak hearts, and you are not weak, Mab, nor am I. I love you ten times more now than on that day when we met and spoke by the shore—and shall love you ten times more when we are married than I do now."

He spoke half in jest, half in earnest; but it was the true accent of love, heard for the first time by Mab. She did not answer him, for what could she say?—but Mr. O'Lally was a subtle reader of faces, and he could read hers and triumph in its meaning.

Annie's secret affection had always wearied him; he could never have enough of Mab's, though so open and undisguised. The more he drank at that sweet well, the more he thirsted for its waters. The great, the only passion of his life had come to him; it had come in the midst of troubles and cares which would have weighed down many a man, and only gave it a keener joy with him.

They walked until their path was broken by a bright and narrow stream. It fell from the cliff—a thread of quicksilver gleaming amongst the rocks, then spreading on the sandy beach and gliding amongst the grey stones it had for many a year smoothed and rounded, it rushed into the sea, as if eager to be devoured by the vast and calm waters. Mr. O'Lally looked at it curiously, and said to Mab,

"That streamlet comes from Shane's River; it has left the pleasant shade and verdure, and flowed through a barren heath,

and for what? To be absorbed by the sea, that does not need it, and, what is more, that will not long continue to receive it. Look at that rock! When it falls the course of that little thread of water is for ever dammed up—it must either find another issue, or go back through the heath.”

He looked at Mab. She smiled, but so sadly that he asked at once what ailed her. For some time she would not tell him, but he pressed her so anxiously, that she yielded.

“Let us sit down first,” she said.

Mr. O’Lally sat on a fragment of rock, and Mab on another, nearer to the water’s edge, and a little beneath him. She clasped her arms round her knees, and, looking up at him, said,

“You want to know what I was thinking of, and I will tell you, though I ought not to do so. That water, rushing so eagerly to the sea, is my own heart. I go to you, and you receive me—truly, fondly, nobly. You absorb me in yourself, and make me yourself, and I am content with the lot I have come so far to seek; but I should be mad if I asked for more, and I do not. Now, Mr. O’Lally, do not smile!—do not jest and deny!—do not tell me I am talking poetry and romance! No, I confess I am excited by joy at my aunt’s recovery, by fatigue, too, and by the pleasure I feel in being out here with you; but something else ails me, and it is that, even more than your entreaties, which makes me speak so openly. Apart from, and beyond all, there is a presentiment of coming evil and sorrow upon me. I protest to you that never more firmly than now did I hope and wish to become yours, and spend my life with you, but never, too, did the insecurity of life and of all earthly projects weigh more heavily upon me than it does at this moment. When I saw that stream rushing so fondly to the sea, and you pointed out that rock, so ready to stem its happy flow, a voice cried within me, ‘Behold your fate!’ God alone knows whether the rock will ever fall between us; but if it should—if the waters should be checked for ever, and retrace their course to their fountain-head—do not forget how fondly they once went to meet you, Mr. O’Lally. They were all yours once—all. I know that if circumstance or death should divide us, some other love will seek you. God grant it may be true and faithful; but if it should not be so, remember, Mr. O’Lally, that there was one woman who once gave you her whole being, and her whole heart.”

“And if the rock should not fall,” said Mr. O’Lally, trying to smile, though he was deeply moved.

"Then you will be generous enough to forget that I laid my pride at your feet, and said what woman never says."

"Mab, you are getting very Irish; your love of simile shews it; but you do not know the whole story of that streamlet, which God forbid you should resemble. You see it in the calm summer time, when the ocean is smooth and skies are fair; but in winter or in autumn, the waves leap up to the cliffs and absorb and devour it with reckless strength."

"Better that than separation," said Mab, calmly. "I care for nothing but that rock, Mr. O'Lally."

And she looked up at it with sad earnestness. Mr. O'Lally lightly laid his hand on her shoulder, and, bending over her, said:

"Mab, you think I have no confidence in you—that I keep my thoughts and my cares to myself. Mab, if I receive and do not return, it is that I can return nothing save bitterness."

"I do not fear it," she replied, in a low voice; for the reserve by which he put her on a level with his acquiescent sisters had pained her keenly.

"Very well," he said, smiling, "you shall have the stormy waves, since you like them, Miss Winter."

Openly, unreservedly, he laid his position before her. It was a hard one, and one full of perils, as Mab quickly saw. The danger was twofold. Mr. O'Lally had built himself a power and popularity, which he had taken as the sure foundations of his commercial enterprises; but his yoke had been too heavy, it seemed, for revolt was ripe, and revolt meant ruin. As he disclosed to her, one by one, the speculations in which he had embarked Mab was dazzled and frightened at their extent. She admired that calm and daring mind, which embraced objects the most varied, and was equal to all, the minute as well as the large. She admired still more the not ungenerous ambition which had led him on. It may be that she exaggerated its disinterestedness, and that Mr. O'Lally was not unselfish as she imagined and he thought, but she could not so exaggerate the breadth and greatness of his aims. They might be visionary, as his lukewarm friends declared—grasping, as his enemies said—none could deny that they were noble and full of golden promise. Mab heard him out with breathless attention, and when he ceased and said:

"Well, Mab, you know all: how do you think it will end?"

She answered, with a flashing eye and an indignant, trembling lip:

"You may be conquered, for you are one and they are many; but you must fight it out to the last—come what may!"

"That 'may' means ruin."

"And it is ruin and shame to yield, Mr. O'Lally."

They were walking homewards. He seized her hand and grasped it with an ardent pressure. These were words after his own heart.

"I shall never yield!" he said, setting his teeth. "I may wish I had been less imperious with them—I use their own words—but to yield now would be useless and shameful. Besides," he added, with his bright smile, "I still have hope."

He looked hopeful, and roused as well as hopeful. He spoke freely as they walked on, and as freely Mab answered him. He could not weary of that first exchange of confidence and thought. Twice, when they neared the house, he made her turn back, and walk slowly to the stream, still speculating with her on the vicissitudes of the past, on the chances of the future, and taking delight in hearing her comment on either. When they parted, at length, Mr. O'Lally went away with a new feeling in his heart. He loved Mab more, and he loved her differently; for his love had become that union of passion and friendship which is as rare as it is exquisite. Mere passion is shameful bondage, mere friendship is cold, but the two are fervent and divine.

And Mr. O'Lally was young, and had imagination, intellect, fancy, and taste to please, as well as heart and eye.

It was Mab's good fortune to charm all these. Her beauty, both delicate and bright, he had always admired; that mixture of spirit and sweetness, which he read in her face, suited him exactly. He did not like a tame woman, he would have cordially detested a strong-minded one. And now, in his young and scarcely known mistress, he found a temper both ardent and submissive, stores of knowledge which he had not suspected, for both modesty and pride had concealed them, and a mind which, if it had not the strength of his own, possessed a *finesse* and a grace to which he cared to lay no claim, though he acknowledged their power and sweetness. Ay, Mab was the very woman who would grace triumph, or soften adversity; the woman of all women whom Mr. O'Lally should have chosen—the rare pearl beyond all others, whom a man could wear with pride in the sight of all, or delight to possess in secret.

With passionate eagerness he now sought her society. Early every morning they met in the garden, and went down to the shore, lingering there as long as they could, and Mab dared.

Often he would appoint a meeting in the day-time, and Mab never felt able to refuse him. It was such perfect pleasure for her, as well as for him, and she saw so well how every such meeting bound her more closely to her lover's heart. Oh ! how many a bright hope, how many a daring scheme, did Mab hear on that solitary shore, along which she walked or sat with Mr. O'Lally !

He had never spoken much of love to her, and he now spoke of it less than ever. Mab knew why—she had grown a part of his being, and he talked to her as we talk to our own hearts. The most impassioned language would not have been so sweet to her ear as his familiar preface to some new confidence :

"Mab, my darling, I forgot to tell you this ;" "Mab, do listen to that, and tell me what you think of it."

If these meetings were dear to Mr. O'Lally, they were priceless to Mab. She felt acutely that this was her halcyon time—her Eden of love. Later she should acknowledge to him her engagement to Robert Ford—oh ! bitter and humiliating confession !—and, as she keenly felt, forfeit some portion of that esteem of which she now possessed the fulness. Later she should tell Miss Lavinia what had happened, and hear for the first time merited reproaches. She should tell Robert, too, and receive his contemptuous forgiveness. All these thoughts tortured her, for neither her conscience nor her pride slumbered. She knew all along what rock it was that hung over her, ever threatening to fall and divide her from Mr. O'Lally. When he was by, happiness stifled every feeling—when he was away, remorse and shame stifled love. There were moments when she longed to go to him, and tell him all, and have it over—there were other moments when she could have flown to the world's end rather than meet him to utter that terrible confession.

She had other trials—trials which he could not share, as she divided his. It was her torment that Miss Ford spoke incessantly of Robert. And she could leave her less than ever. Only early in the morning could she steal out to Mr. O'Lally, and snatch a few minutes of respite and joy. He did not like the concealment, for, if he had faults he was too imperious not to be frank ; but he yielded to Mab's representations, that such a revelation would agitate Miss Lavinia too deeply for the present, and neither by him nor by her was it made.

Matters stood thus when Mab, one morning, availing herself of the fact that her aunt was sleeping longer than usual, ventured to linger with Mr. O'Lally by the sea-shore. The sky was grey

and clouded, but the air was balmy, the sea slept lazily, the whole aspect of nature was full of sweetness and repose.

Mab felt exquisitely happy. She knew that her cares were waiting for her within, but here, under God's sky, walking by Mr. O'Lally's side, she felt them not.

Very different was Mr. O'Lally's mood. He looked irritated and indignant; matters were coming to a crisis, and it was a dark one for him. Mab could not speak of hope; even she saw that hope was well-nigh extinguished, but she uttered gentle words of consolation. Mr. O'Lally heard her, and smiled, not without bitterness—for once they did not agree.

"Mab," he said, "you do not know the root of my trouble—it is not that I am a well-nigh ruined and vanquished man, but that I have become such by trusting promises that have been shamefully broken. All these men, now so bitter against me, urged me on when I did not need them; now that I do, they stand aloof, and leave me to fall. Mab, do you think there is anything more infamous than a faith betrayed?—more bitter than to have relied upon it?"

He spoke with vehement energy. Mab gave heaven and earth a despairing look; this, then, was her sentence—it was uttered by his lips, and it sprang from his heart! Mr. O'Lally saw her emotion; he thought his abrupt manner had caused it, and at once he addressed her in gentler language, and in his usual tone.

"I must go in," hastily said Mab, "I have been out a long time."

He wanted to detain her, but for once he could not do so; for once Mab longed to leave him.

Alas! when she entered she did not find peace. Doctor Flinn had come and gone away in her absence, and something else had occurred.

Miss Lavinia sat up in her bed, propped up by pillows. On the sheet before her lay a letter of thin post paper, and even when Mab entered the room the sick lady's eyes did not leave it.

"Oh! Mab," she said reprovingly, "how I have longed for you to return. Here is a letter for you, and it is from Robert—from dear Robert."

She handed it to her as she spoke.

CHAPTER XI.

MAB'S heart sickened within her as she held in her hand the letter which, a few weeks back, would have brought with it a rush of joy. She knew now the meaning of words which, until then, she had scorned, both perplexed and indignant, "the inconstancy of the human heart." This, then, was the fearful change, of which she had read and heard, and which she now had the humiliation to witness in her own inmost being.

"Mab, what ails you? Why do you not break the seal?" asked Miss Lavinia, justly wondering.

Mab gave her a scared look, and tore open the letter at once. It was not a long one; Robert was a laconic correspondent, even with Mab, but it overflowed with happy news and happier anticipations.

"Dearest Mab," he wrote, "do not expect a prolix letter. I have one in two pages folio by me, but I cannot send it, for everything I wrote in it has proved wrong—every thing is altered and upset. Now, what do you expect from this preamble? News? Well you may, for I have got news, though incomplete as yet; but if I miss this mail you will not know for ever so long, so here it is: Last night Mr. Norton said to me, 'Robert, I told you long ago that I should know how to acknowledge your services; the time to do so is come. I will raise the salaries of your two brothers and take you into partnership next year.' Mab, I could not speak; not even one word could I utter, to thank him especially for William and Ned; but though the tears stood in my eyes, I was mute. Ah! if I had only had your nimble little tongue by me then! I left him and went and told the two boys—I thought they would go wild with joy. They would have it that they owed it all to me; but indeed, Mab they do not. Two such fine, steady, clever young fellows there are not in the whole colony. God bless them! The more I compare them with others of their years, the prouder I am of my two brothers. And now, dearest Mab, will you not indulge me with the hope that this long probation is drawing to a close? I have worked hard, I can acknowledge it now, and it is gratifying to think that the reward is so nigh. From some words which Mr. Norton dropped, I understand that I am to be sent to England shortly. There, it is out, though I did not mean to tell you. Yes, Mab, I can go and fetch you and call you mine at last. Well, there is a place here on which I have set my heart

for dear Aunt Lavinia and you. It is not our villa on the Thames, Mab, with tall trees and trailing roses and the swans, but you will like it. However, I am not a good hand at describing, and I will not describe the home that is to call you mistress. Dear Mab, I can say no more. I feel too happy to talk much. Give my love to aunty."

"Robert, dear Robert!" cried Miss Lavinia, bursting into tears. "Oh! Mab, is it possible? Can we be so happy? Can we see him again and go away with him? Is God so good to sinners?"

Mab's face turned ashy pale. A hundred serpents seemed tearing her heart.

"Aunt, Aunt!" she cried, "I will not deceive you any longer! All is over! I shall never be Robert's wife—never—never!"

Miss Lavinia stared at her, and smiled.

"Mab," she said, "you are ill; what ails you? You are ill!"

"No, aunt—not ill—but broken-hearted!"

Her vehement despair stunned Miss Lavinia, for it convinced her.

"And whose wife, then, will you be?" she asked, at last.

She sat up in her bed, and fixed her hollow eyes full upon Mab.

Mab could not answer. She felt overpowered with grief and shame, and hid her face in her hands. Miss Lavinia looked at her a while, then her head sank back on her pillow, and she turned her face to the wall.

"Poor Robert!—poor old Robert!" was all she said.

Mab rose, and bent over her a face bathed with tears.

"Aunt, dear aunt, forgive me!" she entreated; "I could not help it."

"Poor old Robert!" sighed Miss Lavinia again, and she closed her eyes, and would say no more.

Mab felt wrung and tortured with a thousand pangs. There were words in Robert's letter which haunted her like the sound of his reproachful voice, like the look of his appealing eyes. Her childhood and her youth rose before her reprovingly. His kindness, his teaching, his devotedness to his brothers, his calm but sure affection for her, Miss Lavinia's fond and jealous love for him, besieged her like so many separate enemies, for with every one of these her new love would make her break.

It was not that she repented that love—she could not, for

she had never loved Robert Ford ; she knew it now, and it was inconceivable to her how she could have taken the affection of habit for the feeling which rules a life-time. Oh ! bitter mistake, to be yet cruelly avenged. Yet she could not think without terror of Robert's return, and with still deeper fear did she contemplate confessing all to Mr. O'Lally. She knew in what light he held a broken promise. What if, on learning how readily she had left her first lover for him, his only feeling should be contempt for a heart so weak and faithless ? Alas ! wherever Mab might turn she saw amongst those dark and alienated faces but one ever loving, ever friendly, and it was not Mr. O'Lally's—it was Mr. Ford's. Yes, her heart could lean upon him with filial trust, and take refuge in his indulgent tenderness. Whatever she might do, he would stand by her, and defend her. Oh ! that he were only near, that she might open her whole heart to him, and get that solace in her sorrow !

"God help me, and deliver me from this misery !" prayed Mab, the whole of that bitter day.

And the prayer was heard, and deliverance did come—but, as it often comes, through the deeper grief.

The day was well-nigh worn. Mab, unable to remain any longer in that sick-chamber, where her aunt preserved a silence so reproving, went down to the garden. This time she did not think, or even wish, to meet Mr. O'Lally. He was away, far away ; and solitude, if it could not soothe, at least did not irritate her secret torment. She walked along the garden alleys. A light rain was falling, she did not heed it, though her head was bare, and her summer dress was thin. Presently a quick step was heard on the gravel. She knew it—it was he. She stood still, unable to retreat or fly. He came up to her, chiding in his eye, reproof on his lips.

"Out in this chill, fine rain !" he said, looking at her hair all sparkling with dew, at the drooping folds of her muslin dress. "Oh, Mab ! what do you deserve ?"

She tried to smile, but he was struck with her pallor, with the deadly coldness of the hand he had taken, and held clasped in his.

"What has happened since this morning ?" he asked, quickly ; "what ails you ?—are you ill ?—will you speak to Doctor Flinn ?"

"Is Doctor Flinn here ?" asked Mab, roused at once by so unusual a visit ; for Doctor Flinn had been in the morning, and had not spoken of returning. There was the slightest shade of

embarrassment on Mr. O'Lally's countenance, as he answered, with a smile :

"I came home to look for papers I had forgotten, and meeting him on the way, I made him come with me.

"My aunt is worse!" cried Mab; "I know and feel it, though you will not tell it to me."

She hastily went past him; he followed her, seeking to calm her fears, but Mab scarcely heard him. As they entered the house, they met Doctor Flinn coming down the staircase.

Mab ran up to him, pale and breathless. She seized his hands, she looked eagerly in his face.

"Doctor Flinn," she said, "tell me the truth; my aunt is worse, much worse, Doctor Flinn—I *must* know all!"

"Oh! you must—must you?" good-humouredly said Doctor Flinn; "well, then, Mistress Wilful, know this much: Miss Ford is a little lower to-day than she was yesterday—that is all."

"Doctor Flinn, was she so this morning when you came?"

"Miss Ford is not so well to-day as she was yesterday."

Mab dropped his hands and went up the staircase, agitation in her looks.

"Now don't you go and disturb her with questions," said Doctor Flinn, a little anxiously; "I exact absolute repose."

A sudden light seemed to break across Mab. She turned back and came down quickly.

"Doctor Flinn," she whispered, "do you think that it is emotion is the cause of my aunt's state?"

"How can I tell?—you have not been scolding her, have you?"

"No—but—but we got a letter from Australia, this morning—from Robert Ford, her favourite nephew."

Doctor Flinn looked extremely angry.

"And who told you to read letters from Australia to her?" he asked. "Are you not wise enough to guess that sickness is not equal to what health can bear?"

Mab did not answer, but she leaned her head on the oak banisters, and clasping her hands above it, groaned aloud. Doctor Flinn was shocked and alarmed.

"Come, come," he said kindly, "I daresay there was nothing dreadful in that letter. The news were not desperately bad, were they?"

"No," answered Mab, raising her head, and trying to compose herself, "they were good."

"Then set your heart at ease. Good news could do her no harm—none; but if bad news should come, be careful; hide, conceal, do anything rather than tell the truth."

Little did Doctor Flinn know what he was doing. Little did Mr. O'Lally understand the meaning of the heartstricken look Mab gave him, before she turned away from them both and once more ascended the staircase. When the door above had closed upon her, Mr. O'Lally said anxiously,

"Well, Doctor Flinn, what do you think of Miss Ford?"

"Think of her!—I think she is a dead woman, Mr. O'Lally. I feared it this morning—I am sure of it now. It is a relapse, and a fatal one."

"Are you sure that the agitation of that letter——"

"She had received no letter this morning, and I already saw the dawn of what is fulfilled now. Strong emotions could do her no good, of course; but you know what I told you all along, she seemed better and I was bound to say so, but it was a better, in which I had no faith."

Such had indeed been Doctor Flinn's verdict throughout, and he had imparted it to Mr. O'Lally, who had not thought it needful to tell Mab.

And what did Mab think and feel upstairs? Ask it not—seek not to know, if remorse and grief have never united to torture your own heart. She alluded no more to the letter, and Doctor Flinn could not remove the sting he had involuntarily inflicted; but she would not leave Miss Lavinia's room. No more did she meet Mr. O'Lally by the sea-shore or in the garden. Night and day she sat by the sick-bed on which Miss Ford once more lay prostrate and torpid, rarely speaking, and when she did speak, never of Robert, or of what had passed between them concerning him. On the evening of the third day after her relapse, she rallied considerably. Trembling hope awoke in Mab's heart.

"Oh! aunt, how much better you seem!" she could not help saying.

"I am better, Mab, and I shall tell you why," she replied with some energy; "I am going to prepare for my last journey—the time has come. Mab, send for the parish priest—that Mr. Mac—I can never remember his name, but you know my meaning. From the first I liked his face."

Mab obeyed. The priest was sent for and came. Whilst he was with her aunt she went down. She found Mr. O'Lally below. He rose on seeing her, and took her in his arms with the

tenderness of a father or a friend—not with the love of a lover. And Mab yielded to the protecting and friendly caress. She laid her head on his shoulder and cried there, as if her heart would break; it was bitter, but it was sweet to pour forth her grief thus and there.

“Poor Mab!—poor little Mab!” he said, softly, when her tears had ceased to flow, and her sobs became less frequent; “my poor little darling, remember that if you lose love, infinite love, love deep and true, is left to you! Oh, Mab! do you not think that I ought to speak to your aunt—to tell her that if God calls her away, you remain, not merely safe with my sisters and me, but that your home is henceforth here—that you are the future mistress of O’Lally’s Town.”

With a shiver Mab withdrew from the arms that still clasped her. Ah! it would have been well if she had told him all in that moment; but, if she loved him infinitely, she also feared him deeply, and she dared not.

“What is it?—what ails you?” he asked, surprised at her scared look.

“Nothing,” she faltered; “but you must not speak to my aunt. I know her—it would only agitate, and perhaps pain her. She would trouble herself about my uncle’s consent.”

“Are you not certain of it?”

“As I live,” she replied. “But dear aunt has never felt sure of anything in her life. It would only agitate her.”

“As you please,” he said; but he did not seem quite satisfied. Perhaps his pride was hurt—perhaps Mab’s hesitating manner awakened involuntary suspicion. And she could not bear deceiving him thus. She was fast becoming hateful in her own eyes, even more for his sake than for Robert Ford’s. Unable to remain with him and meet that compassionate, trusting look she had so cruelly betrayed, she left him abruptly, and went back to her aunt.

A night-lamp lit the room, feebly in its remote corners, distinctly enough around the bed, near which it stood. Miss Lavinia’s face lay on her pillow—a holy calm was spread over it. At the foot of the bed sat the priest, his grey hair hung around his brown and rugged face, but there, too, Mab read peace—that peace of the heart which comes from God, and is of God, and surpasseth all understanding. Oh! how she envied them!—the aged man, the dying woman—but both conquerors in the fierce battle of life, in which she had already been defeated.

On seeing Mab standing sadly at the threshold of the door, Miss Lavinia smiled, and beckoned her to approach.

"Mab," she said, when Mab stood near her, "I only want to tell you this—I am happy—very happy. I do not know when I have been so much so, so truly so!"

She spoke clearly, distinctly, without hesitation. Mab had never seen her so. But that cloud of indecision and vagueness which had so long obscured a gentle heart and a fine mind, had passed away from her at the approach of death, as night mists melt away before the morning sun.

"Poor Mab!—poor little Mab!" she said several times to her, "if I could only make you see as I see, how different this world and all it holds would seem to you! Poor child! God help you!—I see bitter sorrow in store for you yet."

"And so do I," thought Mab.

All was not over; and the priest's mission was not fulfilled.

Miss Lavinia received the Last Sacraments of the Church with devout reverence. When this was accomplished, she turned back to this world's concerns, and with a precision, a minuteness, and a decision that amazed Mab, she gave her the most exact directions concerning all that should be done for her, and how the little she left should be disposed of. She forgot no one in this distribution of gifts, least of all Mr. O'Lally's servants; and, having settled everything to her satisfaction, she said, with a little sigh of weariness,

"And now, I think, I have only to die."

She closed her eyes as she spoke, and seemed to sink into a calm slumber.

It lasted the whole night long. Mab watched by her, but not alone; Mr. O'Lally insisted on sharing the vigil with her. Towards morning Miss Lavinia roused herself again, she saw Mab's companion without surprise, and thanked him gently for having remained with Mab.

"But I should like to speak to her alone," she added, quietly.

Mab saw him leave the room. She felt a struggle coming, and with him strength and hope seemed to depart.

"Dear Mab," said Miss Lavinia, taking the young girl's hand, and looking fondly in her face, "I cannot die, and let you do that thing. I have thought of it the whole night long, even when I seemed to sleep. No, Mab, you must not betray Robert—it would be a dreadful sin!—I do not speak for his sake, but for your own. Oh, Mab! be true!—be true!"

"Aunt," said Mab, "hear me. I love Robert dearly, but not as I should love a husband. Aunt, I did not know better."

Miss Lavinia looked in her eyes, and smiled.

"Mab," she said, gently, "reverse the case. You have been jealous of Nelly Norton. I know you have. Suppose Robert wrote to you, not now, but a year back, and said, 'Mab, I committed a mistake—it is not you, but Nelly whom I love.' Mab, just tell me what you would have thought of that?"

Mab could not answer; her conscience told her how bitter her resentment of such infidelity would have been.

"No—no," pursued Miss Lavinia with much energy; "believe a dying woman, child; such excuses are but the self-deceit of human weakness. You loved Robert!"

"Never, aunt!"

"You loved him. You would have married him; you gave him your promise, and that promise, which should have been sacred, you are ready to break, because the law does not make it binding. And what if your love for Mr. O'Lally should grow cool, and another should rise in your heart?"

"Never!" cried Mab, roused into self-defence; "I am wrong towards Robert—I know it; but my love for Mr. O'Lally is true and deep. Aunt, I should love him on my death-bed—I should love him in the next world!"

"Child, the love which rests on a faith betrayed is weak love. Your conscience will kill yours."

"Never!" said Mab again. "For, aunt, you wrong me. I never loved Robert, and I loved Mr. O'Lally the first moment I saw him."

"Poor Robert!" sighed Miss Lavinia; "poor Robert, toiling in a distant country to win you a home, and you betraying him here—poor old Robert!"

Mab's tears flowed freely.

"God knows it breaks my heart," she said, "but I cannot help it; I am pledged to Mr. O'Lally, and death alone can divide us."

"Pledged to Mr. O'Lally!" almost cried Miss Lavinia, clasping her trembling hands. "Pledged to him, and not released by Robert!—and did you tell him of that engagement?"

Mab was silent.

"Did you tell him?" asked Miss Lavinia, raising herself on one elbow.

"No," answered Mab, faintly.

"And you began a second engagement before the first was

broken?—and you are bound to Mr. O'Lally and to Robert at the same time!"

"I did not dare to tell him!" said Mab hiding her face in her hands.

"I pity you," said Miss Lavinia, "from my heart—I pity you, and I pity Mr. O'Lally. You have begun by deceiving him, by making him your dupe. God help you, Mab! I see a bitter future before you."

And so did Mab, and she wrung her hands with unfeigned anguish. How often had she awakened from her sleep at the thought of Mr. O'Lally's burning indignation.

"Poor little thing!" pityingly said Miss Lavinia, "how a little honour would have saved you!"

"Oh, aunt! do not be so severe!"

"Say that to Mr. O'Lally."

"Aunt, he need not know," gasped Mab.

"Not know! not know! Why, you do not suppose I will let you deceive him? No, Mab, I will not die with that on my conscience. If you do not tell him, I shall."

Miss Lavinia spoke with much energy and inexorable will.

Mab turned pale as death. Her long slumbering pride awoke, her conscience spoke, and would be heard, and love and passion were both silenced—for that moment, at least.

"You need tell him nothing," she said. "I shall tell him all myself. He shall be my judge—he shall know the past. I will even do more—by that past I will abide—and relinquish him if needs be."

"You will do that?" cried Miss Lavinia, with a gleam of joy.

"So help me, God—I will!"

There came a great change across Miss Lavinia's face. The flame of life, which her love for Robert had kindled anew, went out fast. Mab ran to the door, and called Mr. O'Lally; he came at once; they stood side by side near Miss Lavinia's bed. Her dying look sought Mab.

"Remember!" she whispered, and, pressing the young girl's hand, she closed her eyes. Thus she fell into a calm slumber—the deepest and the last.

At noon Mr. O'Lally looked compassionately at Mab.

"All is over!" he said, softly.

She did not hear him. She stood by the dead, rigid and pale as death herself. She felt as if a great cloud had come over her—and so there had. It lasted days, and when it passed away it left her weak and prostrate on a sick-bed.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN consciousness returned to Mab she found herself in bed, in a strange room, of which the very furniture was unknown to her. Through the open window she saw the top branches of young trees, on which shone the morning sun, and above them a soft blue sky, with grey, fleecy clouds. A gentle breeze stirred the muslin curtains; birds sang without, and she saw a yellow butterfly hover in the air. She looked at all these things with languid curiosity; then suddenly memory came back, and, burying her face in her pillow, she cried bitterly.

"Poor child!" softly said the kind voice of Miss Ellen Ford.

"Let her cry," whispered Miss Emily; "you know Doctor Flinn said it would do her good."

Mab compelled herself to grow calm, and looked at the sisters. She vaguely remembered seeing their two faces ever near her during her brief, though severe illness. Yes, he had told them all, and they had watched over her as over a priceless treasure.

Very gently and tenderly they told her what there was to tell. She had been removed from O'Lally's Town to Doctor Flinn's house, but everything had been done as she could have wished it, not by them—Doctor Flinn and Mr. O'Lally had not even told them of Miss Ford's illness until all was over; and Mab knew it was best, lest the sad sight should shatter minds already so weak—but by Mr. O'Lally. What they did not say Mab guessed, and she closed her wearied eyelids; she was surfeited with the dreary knowledge.

So she had left his house—the tie of hospitality was broken; the other tie would soon follow. Oh! how Mab longed for death! An evil longing. But she was not herself then. There are for us all stages of feeling when the balance of judgment is gone—when reason and her calm array of arguments alike are mute—when the aching heart alone is strong, and, in its agony, cries out for death, as the hireling for his wished-for wages.

But with the strong and true this bitter mood cannot last. Mab soon grew calm, not merely in outward aspect, but in inner feeling. She looked forward to her bitter future with a sort of resignation. She did not think she should ever be Robert's wife, for she was resolved to tell him all, and she knew his pride; but she would act as if she were to be his—she would hold out no hope to herself, or to her lover—she would be Robert's until

he released her; and she would tell Mr. O'Lally all. She knew him, too, and she felt confident that once he had broken with her, it would be for ever. He loved her, and very dearly, but he would wait no man's bidding to have her. Besides, who knew—who could tell—jealousy might quicken Robert's calm love—a blank followed this dreary thought.

When Mab woke again, she was much better and much stronger. Doctor Flinn was feeling her pulse, and he nodded to Miss Emily, who forthwith informed Mab that Mr. Ford had written to Mr. O'Lally.

"He is somewhere in France; not well enough to come and look for you himself, and he is very much afflicted by the sad news; but he says that a Mrs. Norton, now in Dublin, is to come and fetch you next month. Now, my dear, do you know where Mrs. Norton lives?—that we may write to her not to take the trouble. For, I need not tell you, our brother will not allow you to go."

"That will do for to-day," said Doctor Flinn, forestalling Mab's reply; "my patient looks agitated—no more, please."

Mab did not see Mr. O'Lally for several days. She was sitting, one morning, in Miss Flinn's parlour, when she heard that lady's voice talking outside, and another voice answering it. It was his.

Mab's face was in a flame in a moment. She clutched Miss Ellen's garments, and said, eagerly,

"Do not leave me."

The surprised look had not yet died away from Miss Ellen's face, when the door opened and Miss Emily entered, preceding her brother. He stood behind her, pale, worn, and anxious-looking, but his whole aspect breathing a strong and manly affection which stirred Mab's very heart. She held out her hand as he came towards her; he took it, and, holding it within his own, he looked at her long, but without speaking.

"Thank God you are so well again!" was all he said.

Mab tried to smile, a dreary attempt. The flush of the moment had died from her face, and left it of a deathly paleness. But Mr. O'Lally would not be alarmed; Doctor Flinn had said there was no fear, and he would dread nothing.

"Come, Mr. O'Lally, that will do," said Miss Flinn, putting in her brown face at the door; "my patient must not be intruded upon any longer."

Mr. O'Lally turned round with a smile, and, quietly bidding Mab good morning, he left the room.

"I call that obedience," approvingly said Miss Flinn, patting him on the shoulder as she showed him out through the garden.

"What do you think of her?" he asked.

"I think that when her colour has come back, she will be as pretty as ever—Ah! you are a true man, Mr. O'Lally. I remember when you were a boy you rather scorned beauty, but you have learned to feel its power—quite natural, Mr. O'Lally."

Mr. O'Lally looked disdainful.

"Miss Winter is pretty," he said, "but both you and I, Miss Flinn, have seen far prettier girls than she is. Thank God! she has something beyond what illness could destroy, and what time will assuredly take away."

"What a philosopher!" replied Miss Flinn, with great sarcasm; "only hear him! A girl with a long nose, a squint, and red hair, would charm him just as much, provided, of course, she had a mind and a heart, as that little delicate lady, with her golden locks, her sweet eyes, and her lily-white skin. Of course, I believe that!"

"I am glad you do," said Mr. O'Lally, laughing; and, as he had reached the garden gate, he gave her his hand and bade her good morning.

Miss Flinn looked after him with admiring eyes, then turned round sharply on hearing a step behind her. It was Miss Ellen, walking fast, in the hope of overtaking her brother, but he was already out of sight.

"He is gone," drily said Miss Flinn, "you should have come sooner."

"I wanted to speak to him about Miss Winter," exclaimed Miss Ellen, disappointed.

"And what have you got to say against her?" asked Miss Flinn; "of course you do not think her good enough for your brother! Let me tell you, he might wait years, and not get one half so good as that pretty, modest, intelligent girl—but she is not an O'Lally, of course!" added Miss Flinn, with great scorn.

Miss Ellen looked piteous, and remained mute, whilst Miss Flinn, happy at having put down some one, walked away triumphant.

No sooner did Miss Ellen leave the parlour, than Mab, clasping Miss Emily's hand, whispered eagerly,

"You must help me—never leave me alone with Mr. O'Lally."

Miss Emily's blue eyes overflowed with amazement.

"I can never marry him," said Mab, "never—never!"

Still Miss Emily was too much amazed to speak.

"Why so?" she asked at length.

It was Mab's turn to be mute.

"Why, he means to marry you soon and leave Ireland."

Leave Ireland! Then he was conquered. That was why she had found him so altered and so worn, and it was in that bitter hour of trial that she was forsaking him.

"God help me!" she said, "how shall I do it?"

Miss Emily put no questions, offered no condolence. She had too much tact for one, and too little faith for the other. She could not believe that Mab, that any woman would willingly give up her brother, and she could not see the necessity for doing so in Mab's case. Besides, if Mr. O'Lally wished for Mab—and she could not doubt the sincerity of his passion—would he not have her in spite of every obstacle? And yet, involuntary hope that Mab might have spoken the truth, that Annie's case might not be hopeless yet, lingered in Miss Emily's heart, and with praiseworthy fidelity, she adhered to Mab's request, and never left her side when her brother was by.

Mr. O'Lally did not seem to wish to see or to speak to Mab alone for several days, but when she began to move about the house, when, gaining strength with a rapidity that amazed Doctor Flinn, she even went out and walked in the garden, Mr. O'Lally found with some surprise that his sister Emily was her constant companion. At first he bore this in silence, and attributed it to accident; but when he saw the pertinacity with which his sister clung to one whom in her heart she did not love much, and he knew it, he plainly said to her one morning,

"Emily, I wish to speak to Miss Winter, presently—do you mind leaving me alone with her in the garden for a while?"

"I shall do so if you wish it," calmly replied his sister, "but it is at her request that I stay with her when you call upon her."

"You are not jesting, Emily?"

"Certainly not."

Mr. O'Lally coloured violently. He felt deeply displeased. No matter what Mab's motives might be, she had put a third person between herself and him—a serious offence. What strange caprice now ruled the girl who had met him so freely by the sea-shore; as frank and true in her love as he had been delicate and honourable in his; but he would not be hasty, he would not judge her without hearing her, nor attribute to caprice what might spring from a nobler motive. His sister, who was watching his face attentively, now said to him,

"What shall I do?"

"Nothing," he laconically replied.

"Ah!" she could not help exclaiming, "why did you not prefer Annie?"

"Ah," he playfully replied, "what a difference!"

The door opened as he spoke, and Mab entered. She wore her mourning, and that dark dress gave almost unearthly delicacy to her pale face. Sudden tenderness softened in Mr. O'Lally's look as he saw her, and the last traces of displeasure vanished from his countenance. A gentle glow lit up Mab's features; she might give him up, but she could not help loving him. He advanced to meet her, and she stood waiting. Miss Emily watched their meeting. He took her two hands in his and looked down, smiling in her upraised face. Ah! never—never would his eyes rest with that fond look on another woman—never, never would she give to another that deep fervent gaze she now gave to him, that mingled love and reverence which it is the happiness of a woman's heart to bestow. "They cannot part," thought Miss Emily, "they are too fond of one another, and it is a pity they should; but there is no fear—he will not let her go."

She remained apart whilst Mr. O'Lally led Mab to the window. He still held her hands in his, and spoke to her in a tone too low for Miss Emily to overhear him. She saw Mab redden, then turn pale, then smile, not without effort, and her lips move in reply, and their conversation, such as it was, was over for the morning.

As soon as she found an opportunity to do so, Mab took Miss Emily apart.

"Do not deny me what I am going to ask of you," she said earnestly. "I leave this house to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" interrupted Miss Emily, who, whilst she stood looking at them in the window, had been wondering how soon the marriage ceremony could take place.

"Yes, to-morrow," said Mab. "I have written to Mrs. Norton not to come and look for me—I shall go to Dublin."

"My dear," agitatedly exclaimed Miss Emily, "I can abet you no longer. My brother would throw all the blame upon me—I really cannot—I must tell him."

"I shall tell him myself—but, as I said, I am going to-morrow—I have written to Mrs. Norton in Dublin to wait for me. I am going, and your brother can marry Miss Gardiner, whom you love so much."

"I love her dearly," replied Miss Emily with spirit; "but it is you my brother wishes to marry."

"I shall never be his wife—never. Do not ask why—I shall tell him; but grant me a favour. Let me go alone to Shane's Country to-day. I must see the poor grave for a first and last time; but I know you will care for it."

"Ay, that I will, poor child! But you will not go—or if you do, you will come back. I love Annie dearly, but I shall love my brother's wife more dearly still."

She took and pressed Mab's hand. His wife! How Mab's heart ached to hear his sister utter the words! She apathetically left her hand in Miss Emily's, but raising her eyes she seemed to ask from above that strength to struggle and endure, without which there was no hope of victory.

CHAPTER XIII.

In the course of the afternoon Mab slipped out of the house unobserved, as she thought; but scarcely had she walked ten steps, when a firm hand was laid upon her arm, and looking round with a start, she saw Miss Flinn.

"How dare you stir?" asked that authoritative lady.

"Dear Miss Flinn," coaxingly replied Mab, "I want a change."

"A change!—nonsense! You are going to Shane's Country, and, what is worse, you are going away to-morrow, and everything is at sixes and sevens between you and Mr. O'Lally. Now, don't blush—I am too clear-sighted to be deceived. What is it? Is it a misunderstanding with him?—have his sisters been poking in that Annie Gardiner, whom I can't endure? Don't mind telling me. I have cheated Doctor Flinn out of many a patient, and I will cheat them out of their brother, with as little scruple. Do you want to meet him?—leave it to me."

This friendly offer disconcerted Mab greatly.

"Thank you," she replied; "I am indeed going away to-morrow, but Mr. O'Lally does not know it yet; I shall tell him this evening. And I must go to Shane's Country, Miss Flinn—I must—I must!"

There was something in her voice which made Miss Flinn relax the hold she still kept of her. She felt that to visit her aunt's grave was not Mab's greatest trial. She gave her a piercing look and said,

"Well, you must have your way in that, at least; but, I warn you, Mr. O'Lally shall know you are going. I always liked love stories to end well, and it will go hard if this one ends badly through any fault of mine. What matter about his sisters? They are a pair of silly women. Anyone who sees you and Mr. O'Lally together can see that you were made for each other. I defy seas and mountains to keep you apart, and apart you shall not be, if I can help it. Besides, I can't bear Annie."

Mab heard her in silence: her eyes bent, her features fixed as marble. Hope was dead, and no language, however friendly, could revive it now. Miss Flinn gave her an expressive look, and turned back to the house in no hopeful mood. Mab went on her way.

Day was declining when she reached Shane's Country. How calm, how sweet seemed that home of the dead! Mab soon found the grave which had wakened Miss Ellen's forebodings, and haunted her aunt's sick-bed. It was filled now, for in it, according to her wish, Miss Lavinia had been laid; a slab of plain stone marked the spot; it was not yet fenced in, but her name and a simple "*Requiescat in pace*" were already engraven on its new white surface, free, as yet, from moss or stain.

By that grave Mab stood mute and hopeless. A rosy flush lit earth and sky, tints of orange and gold passed across the rocks, and the dark verdure of the valley below contrasted with the pale emerald of the little nook above; it was a spot full of beauty and repose, but Mab saw and felt nothing of its loveliness. She had come there to bid the dead a last adieu, and to pour out in the silence and solitude of the spot the burthen of her living sorrows.

She knelt at the foot of the grave, and tried to pray, but as her grief rose and overwhelmed her, she threw herself on the cold stone with a passion unknown to her calm youth. She sobbed aloud in the transport of her grief:

"Aunt!—aunt!—what have you done?" she moaned again and again—for, alas! life and life's feelings were twined around her very heart, and to that spot, where everything spoke of mortality, where the sod rose in green hillocks, where skulls lay hidden in the high waving grass, Mab had carried the image of Mr. O'Lally. She had striven for strength, but strength had not come; she had endeavoured to forget him, and never had he been more living in her heart. Every impulse, every thought, every wish, seemed to cling to him.

"Oh! if I could, if I only could forget!" she moaned again.

"Mab!—dear Mab!" said a fond and well-known voice. It was he; he had returned unexpectedly, and had made Shane's Country his way home, in order to see that his orders had been fulfilled; and thus, against her wish and not with his, he found her.

She looked up, and, in all her grief she found comfort and consolation in his face. It was bitter, it was cruel, to give him up, but it was very sweet to be so loved. He compelled her to rise; he led her away to the old porch: he made her sit down on a broken shaft, and, sitting down by her side, he took her hand in his. He loved her very much; he loved her in her sorrow and her loneliness, in all that made him feel her doubly his.

"Why did they let you come here alone?" he said, reproachfully. "My poor little darling, they should not."

"It was my wish."

"Why did you not let me come with you?"

"Grief is best alone."

"No, Mab, not always. Mab, you have your sorrows, and I have mine. Mab, my heart is broken!"

And, before she could guess his intention, he had flung his arms around her, his head was resting on her bosom, and he was crying like a child. Mab forgot all, except his grief.

"What is it?—what is it?" she cried. "Oh, God! help me!—what can have happened to you?"

He did not answer at once, and she bent her face over him, and covered his forehead with kisses and tears. At length he looked up, red and ashamed, at having given way so far.

"Mab," he said, trying to smile, "I think I must have known you in my dreams; at all events, you are a part of myself, and with you I need feel no shame at my weakness. I cannot. Oh! Mab! though these tears are the first I have shed since I was a boy, I could shed tears more bitter still, when I think of what I have gone through to-day. Mab, their ingratitude would break a prouder heart than mine. They have turned against me, every man of them; they have, the traitors, the cowards!—and the labour of years, the care, the toil of a lifetime, have perished in one hour!"

He had risen as he spoke, and he was walking agitatedly amongst the graves. Mab followed him, and, passing her arm within his, tried to soothe him. He stopped short, and looked down at her very sorrowfully.

"God knows how dearly I love you," he said; "but even

you, my little Mab—ay, even you—have no cure for this sorrow. Mab, you do not know your own birth and kin; perhaps you are of Irish race, at all events, I am sure I have given you an Irish heart. Mab, my country has been the passion of my youth. She has saved me from many an error, from many a fall—for I vowed, as a boy, that she should be proud of me yet—and now this is the end of it all. They say I am ambitious—I am—I declare, I vow I am; would many place their ambition as I once placed mine? Well, it is over now; they have conquered. I resolved once that what one man could do for Ireland should be done by me; I kept clear, as I thought, of every element of discord and strife. I compelled myself to think of the lowest form of prosperity, the material; but I hoped to make it a step to the higher—and you see how I have fared. Oh, Mab!—Mab!—it is too much!”

His tears fell no more; that fountain, so rarely unsealed in manhood, had once more run dry, but his lips quivered; and Mab, with a heart full of woe, felt that his heart was, indeed, broken; ay, he was wrecked in one of those aims of life that are all in all to man.

“Yes,” he said, looking down at her wistfully, “I met them all to-day. I bent my pride so far as to ask what my sin had been, and to extend the hand of reconciliation; but they informed me, through their precious mouthpiece, Mr. Briggs, that it was too late—that, as a friend and neighbour, I was welcome to stay amongst them, but that they could no longer have a master. Their own words, Mab. Stay!” he added, firing up; “stay!—never! I will pack up my household gods, and seek a more friendly shore. And I will take you with me, my little fairy-queen,” he added, trying to smile. “Mab, I will not exaggerate—I will not say what is never true, that your love is everything to me—no, it is not—for I have lived and could live yet, for other things—but I will say this, it is the only sweetness now left in my lot—the only consolation of my adversity.”

“God help me!” cried Mab, “or I am undone—undone!”

“What is it?” asked Mr. O’Lally, looking down at her with surprise in his face. “What ails you?”

“Oh, aunt!—aunt!” moaned Mab.

“Poor child!—poor child!” he said, clasping her in his arms. “Mab, it is a cruel loss; but there is much love left to you.”

She looked up in his face; she read his meaning there. Oh!

how much he loved her! It was cruel, it was terrible to give him up, and yet it must be done.

"For God's sake, let me go!" she said. "You do not know what you are doing."

He released her at once, surprised and pained.

"God help me!" said Mab. "I wish I were dead ere it had come to this. I wish I were dead!"

"What is it?" he asked, uneasily.

"We must part," said Mab.

"Never!" he answered, smiling, and thinking she alluded to her intention of taking a journey to England. "If needs it must be, I shall go with you and Mrs. Norton—ay, and bring you back to O'Lally's Town."

Mab gave a desolate look below. Never, never again should she see the dwelling at the foot of the mountain, and that long wild shore, and its cloudy skies—never, never!

"Forgive me!" she cried. "Of all your enemies I am the most treacherous and the most cruel—for I have deceived you. We must part, and part for ever!"

Mr. O'Lally looked thunderstruck; but he soon rallied. He took Mab's two hands and pressed them within his own, with a force of which he was unconscious.

"No, Mab," he said; "if I but hold up my little finger my two sisters will rise and follow me to the end of the earth; and you, so much nearer than they are—you, a part of myself—you cannot stay behind when I go."

"Oh! I cannot—I cannot!" said Mab, weeping bitterly; "forgive me—but I cannot."

"Mab, you love me—if ever I read love in your eyes, I read it there this morning—how can you remain, then, if I go?"

Mab's head sank on her bosom, and her face shunned his look.

"I have been engaged to Robert Ford these three years," she said.

She said no more, but she had said enough. He dropped her hands, as if they had been fire. He did not speak—he seemed unable—the sudden blow deprived him of speech, and almost of thought. His first act was to leave her side—his next to give her a look of the deepest indignation—a look from which she shrunk ashamed and afraid.

Mab had hoped that Mr. O'Lally's first impulse would be that of wounded love. She had not taken into account a temper of the most jealous pride. He felt duped, deceived, and wanton.

ly betrayed, and in his anger he forgot Mab's excuse—her love for him. He only remembered that for weeks she had cruelly played with his passion, and now, when it had become part of his being, she told him what he should have known from the first moment. He could not trust himself with words, he walked away to the end of the churchyard.

When he came back he found Mab sitting, apathetic and pale, on the broken shaft-pillar. He stopped before her, and, looking down at her, he said, coldly,

"I forgive you, Miss Winter—which is more than you have a right to expect; but I would scorn to resent a woman's offence, least of all yours; only pray tell me this—what was your motive?"

The cold sarcasm of his tone stung her very heart. She started to her feet, flushed and indignant.

"My motive!" she said—"my motive was that I loved you, and that I was mad. Despise me—it is your right, as a man, for having wantonly betrayed the secret no woman reveals; but do not dare to doubt me."

"Despise you!" said Mr. O'Lally, with sudden softness. "No, Mab, but you are mine; mine by the best of all rights, your own gift, and I cannot give you up."

He laid his hand on her shoulder, and looked down at her securely. Mab closed her eyes, not to see him. Now was the terrible moment—the struggle for life and death. Death! Oh! what was it? She envied her aunt in her grave. She had lived and died without having known passion; never had her heart and her conscience been at strife. Oh! had she undergone those pangs, she would not have laid that cruel injunction upon her. She looked up at Mr. O'Lally.

"Hear me," she said, "then be my master and my judge. Know all, then decide."

She sat down, and he sat down by her side. She told him the story of her youth, and told it truly. She excused, she palliated nothing. He learned from her all her weaknesses and vanities—so far as she herself knew them; and every detail of her ill-fated engagement with Robert Ford.

"And did you not love him?" asked Mr. O'Lally.

"No—if I were on my death-bed, I should still say I did not. How often has he reproached me with it, and taxed me with my indifference. Oh! that I had heeded his father's warnings!—but I was vain!—it pleased me to have a lover—one, too, whom Ellen Norton would have been glad to take from me; and

he released her; and she would tell Mr. O'Lally all. She knew him, too, and she felt confident that once he had broken with her, it would be for ever. He loved her, and very dearly, but he would wait no man's bidding to have her. Besides, who knew—who could tell—jealousy might quicken Robert's calm love—a blank followed this dreary thought.

When Mab woke again, she was much better and much stronger. Doctor Flinn was feeling her pulse, and he nodded to Miss Emily, who forthwith informed Mab that Mr. Ford had written to Mr. O'Lally.

"He is somewhere in France; not well enough to come and look for you himself, and he is very much afflicted by the sad news; but he says that a Mrs. Norton, now in Dublin, is to come and fetch you next month. Now, my dear, do you know where Mrs. Norton lives?—that we may write to her not to take the trouble. For, I need not tell you, our brother will not allow you to go."

"That will do for to-day," said Doctor Flinn, forestalling Mab's reply; "my patient looks agitated—no more, please."

Mab did not see Mr. O'Lally for several days. She was sitting, one morning, in Miss Flinn's parlour, when she heard that lady's voice talking outside, and another voice answering it. It was his.

Mab's face was in a flame in a moment. She clutched Miss Ellen's garments, and said, eagerly,

"Do not leave me."

The surprised look had not yet died away from Miss Ellen's face, when the door opened and Miss Emily entered, preceding her brother. He stood behind her, pale, worn, and anxious-looking, but his whole aspect breathing a strong and manly affection which stirred Mab's very heart. She held out her hand as he came towards her; he took it, and, holding it within his own, he looked at her long, but without speaking.

"Thank God you are so well again!" was all he said.

Mab tried to smile, a dreary attempt. The flush of the moment had died from her face, and left it of a deathly paleness. But Mr. O'Lally would not be alarmed; Doctor Flinn had said there was no fear, and he would dread nothing.

"Come, Mr. O'Lally, that will do," said Miss Flinn, putting in her brown face at the door; "my patient must not be intruded upon any longer."

Mr. O'Lally turned round with a smile, and, quietly bidding Mab good morning, he left the room.

deserve to be forgotten by you ; and to my grave I shall bear the sting of this grief. Am I sure I loved you ? Ah ! do you think I do not know that if I had not betrayed myself, because the thought of your danger conquered every other fear—do you think I do not know that you would never have spoken—never would you have tried to win a poor and nameless girl, as I am. You cannot deny it,” she added, watching the change that came across his face ; “ and, since I am giving you up, I will lay my pride at your feet, and confess you were right to aim higher, and that I did not deserve you. Yes, you will do well to marry Miss Gardiner ; she loves you, she is rich, well-born, and she has deceived no one. And I—what am I ? ”

She hid her face in her hands. He removed them, and looked at her very sorrowfully.

“ Oh, Mab,” he said, “ you are a true woman ; from accused, you turn judge ! But, in my turn, I dare you to deny that I did not love you truly.”

“ Ah ! you did, I know it,” she said, sadly. “ And, since you have loved me, have mercy on me. I am not strong—I am not sure I could resist you—be strong for me. I have no old blood, no honourable name—God help me !—I have no country, to be proud of—I am nothing, and no one—I have only the conscience Heaven gave me ; help me to stand by that ! I silenced it ; but it speaks now, and it speaks very plainly ; its voice is hard and bitter, but it is true, and I must obey it. Help me, Mr. O’Lally. Do not make the girl you once thought worthy of becoming your wife break her word and her honour. Forgive her the wrong she has done you, and give her up, rather than keep her, and despise her in your heart for the wrong she would do another.”

Mr. O’Lally could not resist that appeal. He stooped, he pressed a long last kiss on her pale and trembling lips, and he said,

“ Good-bye, Mab. You will marry that man, and I—who knows ?—perhaps I shall marry Annie Gardiner. I daresay it was to be, and I believe in destiny. Good-bye, Mab. I shall never love again, nor will you. We dare not—we cannot. It is over for us both—the joy, the fever. Oh ! that what is so sweet should not last longer ! Good-bye, Mab—that is ended.”

He released her gently, and left her. She remained alone in the quiet church-yard, alone among the silent graves. Ay, it was over. The dream, the delight, the young love—it was over, and life remained now—life, dull, tame, and wearisome !



PART IV.

THE COST OF VICTORY.

CHAPTER I.

EVERY one was struck with Mab's pale face when she entered Miss Flinn's parlour at tea-time. Miss Emily and Miss Ellen exchanged looks, and Miss Flinn glanced suspiciously at the two sisters; but Doctor Flinn, who knew nothing, and who, as Miss Flinn always told him, was as blind as a beetle, stared at Mab in unfeigned surprise.

"Why, what ails my patient?" he cried.

Mab tried to smile, and, going up to his chair, she said with assumed cheerfulness,

"Your patient is sad at leaving you and your kind home to-morrow, Doctor Flinn; but it must be. And, as she leaves early, accept her cordial thanks this evening."

She held out her hand, and, in his surprise, Doctor Flinn took it without speaking.

"To-morrow!" he cried, at length. "I cannot allow it; besides, you must not think of taking such a journey alone."

"Alone!" said Miss Emily, with something like indignation; "and do you suppose that our brother would allow Miss Winter to go alone? We all three leave early to-morrow morning, and that is why you see me here this evening, Doctor Flinn."

Doctor Flinn felt silenced, and drank his tea without uttering another word. As soon as the meal was over Mab rose and went to her room. She was quickly followed by Miss Flinn.

"I love her dearly," replied Miss Emily with spirit; "but it is you my brother wishes to marry."

"I shall never be his wife—never. Do not ask why—I shall tell him; but grant me a favour. Let me go alone to Shane's Country to-day. I must see the poor grave for a first and last time; but I know you will care for it."

"Ay, that I will, poor child! But you will not go—or if you do, you will come back. I love Annie dearly, but I shall love my brother's wife more dearly still."

She took and pressed Mab's hand. His wife! How Mab's heart ached to hear his sister utter the words! She apathetically left her hand in Miss Emily's, but raising her eyes she seemed to ask from above that strength to struggle and endure, without which there was no hope of victory.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN the course of the afternoon Mab slipped out of the house unobserved, as she thought; but scarcely had she walked ten steps, when a firm hand was laid upon her arm, and looking round with a start, she saw Miss Flinn.

"How dare you stir?" asked that authoritative lady.

"Dear Miss Flinn," coaxingly replied Mab, "I want a change."

"A change!—nonsense! You are going to Shane's Country, and, what is worse, you are going away to-morrow, and everything is at sixes and sevens between you and Mr. O'Lally. Now, don't blush—I am too clear-sighted to be deceived. What is it? Is it a misunderstanding with him?—have his sisters been poking in that Annie Gardiner, whom I can't endure? Don't mind telling me. I have cheated Doctor Flinn out of many a patient, and I will cheat them out of their brother, with as little scruple. Do you want to meet him?—leave it to me."

This friendly offer disconcerted Mab greatly.

"Thank you," she replied; "I am indeed going away to-morrow, but Mr. O'Lally does not know it yet; I shall tell him this evening. And I must go to Shane's Country, Miss Flinn—I must—I must!"

There was something in her voice which made Miss Flinn relax the hold she still kept of her. She felt that to visit her aunt's grave was not Mab's greatest trial. She gave her a piercing look and said,

"Well, you must have your way in that, at least; but, I warn you, Mr. O'Lally shall know you are going. I always liked love stories to end well, and it will go hard if this one ends badly through any fault of mine. What matter about his sisters? They are a pair of silly women. Anyone who sees you and Mr. O'Lally together can see that you were made for each other. I defy seas and mountains to keep you apart, and apart you shall not be, if I can help it. Besides, I can't bear Annie."

Mab heard her in silence: her eyes bent, her features fixed as marble. Hope was dead, and no language, however friendly, could revive it now. Miss Flinn gave her an expressive look, and turned back to the house in no hopeful mood. Mab went on her way.

Day was declining when she reached Shane's Country. How calm, how sweet seemed that home of the dead! Mab soon found the grave which had wakened Miss Ellen's forebodings, and haunted her aunt's sick-bed. It was filled now, for in it, according to her wish, Miss Lavinia had been laid; a slab of plain stone marked the spot; it was not yet fenced in, but her name and a simple "*Requiescat in pace*" were already engraven on its new white surface, free, as yet, from moss or stain.

By that grave Mab stood mute and hopeless. A rosy flush lit earth and sky, tints of orange and gold passed across the rocks, and the dark verdure of the valley below contrasted with the pale emerald of the little nook above; it was a spot full of beauty and repose, but Mab saw and felt nothing of its loveliness. She had come there to bid the dead a last adieu, and to pour out in the silence and solitude of the spot the burthen of her living sorrows.

She knelt at the foot of the grave, and tried to pray, but as her grief rose and overwhelmed her, she threw herself on the cold stone with a passion unknown to her calm youth. She sobbed aloud in the transport of her grief:

"Aunt!—aunt!—what have you done?" she moaned again and again—for, alas! life and life's feelings were twined around her very heart, and to that spot, where everything spoke of mortality, where the sod rose in green hillocks, where skulls lay hidden in the high waving grass, Mab had carried the image of Mr. O'Lally. She had striven for strength, but strength had not come; she had endeavoured to forget him, and never had he been more living in her heart. Every impulse, every thought, every wish, seemed to cling to him.

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"It was my wish."

"Why did you not let me come with you?"

"Grief is best alone."

"No, Mab, not always. Mab, you have your sorrows, and I have mine. Mab, my heart is broken!"

And, before she could guess his intention, he had flung his arms around her, his head was resting on her bosom, and he was crying like a child. Mab forgot all, except his grief.

"What is it?—what is it?" she cried. "Oh, God! help me!—what can have happened to you?"

He did not answer at once, and she bent her face over him, and covered his forehead with kisses and tears. At length he looked up, red and ashamed, at having given way so far.

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"Never !" he answered, smiling, and thinking she alluded to her intention of taking a journey to England. "If needs it must be, I shall go with you and Mrs. Norton—ay, and bring you back to O'Lally's Town."

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"Despise you!" said Mr. O'Lally, with sudden softness. "No, Mab, but you are mine; mine by the best of all rights, your own gift, and I cannot give you up."

He laid his hand on her shoulder, and looked down at her securely. Mab closed her eyes, not to see him. Now was the terrible moment—the struggle for life and death. Death! Oh! what was it? She envied her aunt in her grave. She had lived and died without having known passion; never had her heart and her conscience been at strife. Oh! had she undergone those pangs, she would not have laid that cruel injunction upon her. She looked up at Mr. O'Lally.

"Hear me," she said, "then be my master and my judge. Know all, then decide."

She sat down, and he sat down by her side. She told him the story of her youth, and told it truly. She excused, she palliated nothing. He learned from her all her weaknesses and vanities—so far as she herself knew them; and every detail of her ill-fated engagement with Robert Ford.

"And did you not love him?" asked Mr. O'Lally.

"No—if I were on my death-bed, I should still say I did not. How often has he reproached me with it, and taxed me with my indifference. Oh! that I had heeded his father's warnings!—but I was vain!—it pleased me to have a lover—one, too, whom Ellen Norton would have been glad to take from me; and

I was wilful, too, and, perhaps, I was grateful to Robert, who had been very kind to me; and so it was done—and now it is past my undoing.”

“Why so?” asked Mr. O’Lally; “have you made no promise to me?”

“Do not remind me of it!” cried Mab, with despair. “I can forgive myself loving you; I could not help it, and though it has been misery, it has been happiness too—the greatest, the deepest I have ever known, or shall ever know again. But I cannot forgive myself deceiving you. I should have told you at once; I should have made you turn from me with coldness and surprise, and, perhaps with contempt—but I should not have deceived you. But, remember, I had not time to think before I was both betrayed and beloved. It was so great a joy, that everything else seemed weak in comparison. I gave up Robert and my promise in my heart, and became all yours. And if he had not written, and my dying aunt had not appealed to my conscience and my honour, I do believe that yours I should be still.”

“Mab,” said Mr. O’Lally, “if you had loved that young man, and had been faithful to him through lightness or weakness of heart, I would not have you—for I should despise you; but you say you never loved him.”

“Never!” cried Mab.

“And you love me, Mab?”

“Ah!” she sighed, “I have said it too often—I must say it no more; and yet it is true!” broke from her.

“Mab, you are mine, then; mine by the best right, and I will give you up to none.”

“No,” sorrowfully said Mab, “I am his; his, by the most undeniable and sacred right—my word of honour. It is my sin and my shame that I ever forgot it. We cannot always control our feelings, but we are masters of our own actions. I feel in my heart that if he betrayed me, as I once thought of betraying him, I should scorn him with unutterable scorn. By that law—a cruel and severe, but just law—I must abide.”

“Are you sure you ever loved me?” asked Mr. O’Lally, smiling bitterly.

Mab’s tears flowed at the question.

“You can say that,” she exclaimed, “you can say it! I have wronged you, I confess it; and yet how different will be our sorrows and our destinies! You will strive anew with the world; and marry another, and forget me, as, I confess, I

deserve to be forgotten by you; and to my grave I shall bear the sting of this grief. Am I sure I loved you? Ah! do you think I do not know that if I had not betrayed myself, because the thought of your danger conquered every other fear—do you think I do not know that you would never have spoken—never would you have tried to win a poor and nameless girl, as I am. You cannot deny it,” she added, watching the change that came across his face; “and, since I am giving you up, I will lay my pride at your feet, and confess you were right to aim higher, and that I did not deserve you. Yes, you will do well to marry Miss Gardiner; she loves you, she is rich, well-born, and she has deceived no one. And I—what am I?”

She hid her face in her hands. He removed them, and looked at her very sorrowfully.

“Oh, Mab,” he said, “you are a true woman; from accused, you turn judge! But, in my turn, I dare you to deny that I did not love you truly.”

“Ah! you did, I know it,” she said, sadly. “And, since you have loved me, have mercy on me. I am not strong—I am not sure I could resist you—be strong for me. I have no old blood, no honourable name—God help me!—I have no country, to be proud of—I am nothing, and no one—I have only the conscience Heaven gave me; help me to stand by that! I silenced it; but it speaks now, and it speaks very plainly; its voice is hard and bitter, but it is true, and I must obey it. Help me, Mr. O’Lally. Do not make the girl you once thought worthy of becoming your wife break her word and her honour. Forgive her the wrong she has done you, and give her up, rather than keep her, and despise her in your heart for the wrong she would do another.”

Mr. O’Lally could not resist that appeal. He stooped, he pressed a long last kiss on her pale and trembling lips, and he said,

“Good-bye, Mab. You will marry that man, and I—who knows?—perhaps I shall marry Annie Gardiner. I daresay it was to be, and I believe in destiny. Good-bye, Mab. I shall never love again, nor will you. We dare not—we cannot. It is over for us both—the joy, the fever. Oh! that what is so sweet should not last longer! Good-bye, Mab—that is ended.”

He released her gently, and left her. She remained alone in the quiet church-yard, alone among the silent graves. Ay, it was over. The dream, the delight, the young love—it was over, and life remained now—life, dull, tame, and wearisome!



PART IV.

THE COST OF VICTORY.

CHAPTER I.

EVERY one was struck with Mab's pale face when she entered Miss Flinn's parlour at tea-time. Miss Emily and Miss Ellen exchanged looks, and Miss Flinn glanced suspiciously at the two sisters; but Doctor Flinn, who knew nothing, and who, as Miss Flinn always told him, was as blind as a beetle, stared at Mab in unfeigned surprise.

"Why, what ails my patient?" he cried.

Mab tried to smile, and, going up to his chair, she said with assumed cheerfulness,

"Your patient is sad at leaving you and your kind home to-morrow, Doctor Flinn; but it must be. And, as she leaves early, accept her cordial thanks this evening."

She held out her hand, and, in his surprise, Doctor Flinn took it without speaking.

"To-morrow!" he cried, at length. "I cannot allow it; besides, you must not think of taking such a journey alone."

"Alone!" said Miss Emily, with something like indignation; "and do you suppose that our brother would allow Miss Winter to go alone? We all three leave early to-morrow morning, and that is why you see me here this evening, Doctor Flinn."

Doctor Flinn felt silenced, and drank his tea without uttering another word. As soon as the meal was over Mab rose and went to her room. She was quickly followed by Miss Flinn.

"And so," said the free-spoken lady, "you are going without seeing Mr. O'Lally, after all."

"I have seen him," coldly answered Mab.

"And quarrelled then. That is how you, both of you, want to spoil my love story."

Mab's eyes lit.

"Quarrelled!" she said. "Quarrelled with Mr. O'Lally! Never!—never!"

"Then, what is the matter?" asked Miss Flinn.

But Mab was not going to take that lady into her confidence, and she remained silent.

"You will not tell me?" said Miss Flinn; "well, I suppose it is natural. Only, you know, I can guess. Since you have not quarrelled, the mischief lies elsewhere. Perhaps it is something that will pass away."

"No, never!" interrupted Mab.

"Never is nonsense, my dear. It may pass away, I tell you; though, I daresay, your pride would then stand between you and him. Now, child," added Miss Flinn, very softly, "it is a pity it should be so. Why, then, if the obstacle does pass away, why should you not write to me, and let me set all right, and save your pride? Am I not a woman, and do I not know what it is? Ah! if I had had a friend to do for me what I want to do for you, I should not now be Bridget Flinn, my dear."

A gleam of sudden hope shone in Mab's eyes as she heard this offer. But, though she kindly pressed Miss Flinn's hand, she sighed as she answered.

"Thank you; but it cannot be. All is over and nothing will ever happen."

"And so my love-story must slip out of my fingers," pathetically remonstrated Miss Flinn; "and he must marry that Annie who has been angling after him so many years. Ah! you do not like that!"

But though Mab had been unable to repress a start, her pride would not allow her to confess useless jealousy.

"Let Mr. O'Lally marry whom he pleases," she said coldly; "I claim no right to interfere."

"Have your way," sighed Miss Flinn—"have your way."

And she left the room, to Mab's relief. Her lot was hard to bear; but it was best borne in silence. Early the next morning she left—the two sisters accompanying her, as had been agreed. Mab made no opposition to their taking this long and

fatiguing journey ; she found it sweet to receive and accept this last proof of Mr. O'Lally's tenderness and affection.

In Dublin they parted, for in Dublin they found Mrs. Norton. She was domiciled in Sackville Street, and extended a hospitable invitation to the sisters ; but both Miss Emily and Miss Ellen thought they would rather leave by the evening train, travel all night, and be at O'Lally's Town to-morrow.

"Have you no message for our brother?" whispered the gentle Miss Ellen, as she embraced their guest for the last time.

"Tell him my heart is broken," Mab could not help saying. "No, it is useless to trouble him ; tell him to forget me."

They left her. Happy women !—no duty, no adverse fate could divide them from their brother. As long as life lasted, he was theirs, and they were his.

Mrs. Norton had been unusually silent and observant whilst Mr. O'Lally's sisters were present. She became more communicative when they were gone.

"I need not ask how Ireland agreed with you," she said, giving Mab a sharp look, "your face speaks for itself. Well, I have no doubt O'Lally's Town was a dull place. And those two sisters are evidently poor creatures," compassionately added Mrs. Norton.

"They are very kind, ma'am."

"I have no doubt about it ; but not brilliant. They were afraid of me," added Mrs. Norton, compressing her lips, and winking at Mab most significantly ; "bless you ! I saw at a glance why they would not stay ; but I should have done nothing to them," she continued, magnanimously. "Why should I?"

"Why, indeed !" thought Mab.

"At the same time," said Mrs. Norton, putting her hands behind her back, and looking out on the bright and stirring prospect her windows afforded, "I am just as well pleased not to have gone for you. There is only one spot in all Ireland I value, and that is Sackville Street. I would not put a foot in Ireland, if I could not live in Sackville Street," continued Mrs. Norton, warming with her subject ; "would you?"

"I have not thought about it, ma'am."

"As for scenery," said Mrs. Norton, waving her hand, "I do not value it—I do not believe in it ; it is a stupid invention of tourists and inn-keepers."

Mab did not answer. Mrs. Norton looked hard at her, and said softly,

"Poor little thing ! your heart is sore, of course it is. But I do by you as I would be done by—I give you no sympathy,

no consolation. When my great trouble came to me, twenty years ago," continued Mrs. Norton, her voice faltering as she spoke, "I said to my friends—'don't pity me, don't—I ask no more. Anything you like, but no pity, no consolation.' And that is why," she added, more calmly, "I do not speak to you of your loss, nor give you what I could not bear myself. And now, my dear, do you wish to see Dublin, or are you ready to leave, say after to-morrow? Speak plainly."

"The sooner we leave the better," replied Mab, almost impetuously.

"Then let it be after to-morrow. I quite understand your feelings, my dear."

So it was decreed, and it was done. The uneventful journey closed on a dull afternoon, a London afternoon, when London is cloudy and gas has to be lit early. Mrs. Norton spoke very little; Mab was utterly mute; she looked at nothing, and she saw nothing until her companion said,

"I do believe this is Queen Square."

Mab looked then. She recognised the trees, the railings, the houses, and said it was Queen Square, but she showed no emotion, she shed no tears. There was no one to receive her at the house, no one to welcome her, save Lucy in deep mourning. The girl looked wistfully at her young mistress as she alighted from the cab. Mab, once so blooming, now wore the settled pallor of a constant grief; her bright eyes, "that used to look through you like so much light," as Lucy said, were dull and cold; her lids were heavy with weeping, and around them extended that pale purple circle which Guido gave to his Beatrice Cenci, which eye-beholders of that sad scene saw in Marie Antoinette when she ascended the scaffold.

The "glad to see you safe home, Miss," of poor Lucy died on her lips as their looks met. She burst into tears with the easy grief of one whose heart is not reached; but Mab apathetically paid the cabman, saw her luggage transferred from the roof of the vehicle to the hall, then bidding Lucy close the door, slowly walked upstairs, followed by Mrs. Norton. That lady had advised her young friend not to return to Queen Square; she had also, when Mab declined her invitation, offered to stay with her until Mr. Ford's return; but Mab had thanked her and frankly replied,

"I am best alone."

"Of course you are," answered Mrs. Norton, emphatically. "And yet," she added, breaking through her own rule of not

administering comfort in any wise, "and yet it would do you good to cry."

"I cannot," answered Mab sitting down in the parlour which they had entered, "I cannot."

"Of course you cannot, of course not. And yet this is not the grief, it is not. Wait till you are a wife, and lose your husband. Then you will taste the very dregs of sorrow and bitterness."

Mrs. Norton spoke excitedly, as she always did when this subject was touched. But the words wife and husband grated harshly on Mab's ear, and she hastened to entreat Mrs. Norton to partake of some refreshment after their long and fatiguing journey.

But Mrs. Norton would take nothing.

"I only want sleep," she said, "and so do you, and it is no use making you talk whether you like it or not; so, good night, child."

She spoke and held out her hand with unusual kindness; but nothing could move Mab now, once so impulsive. Apathetically she thanked Mrs. Norton for all her kindness, and apathetically she saw her go. When she found herself alone, almost for the first time since the parting in Shane's Country, the cry of every great sorrow broke from her:

"I cannot bear it!" she moaned to herself, as she wandered over the whole solitary house, seeking her lost peace and happiness. "I cannot bear it!" It was very hard. She had no hope, no illusions. The grief she felt for Miss Lavinia's death, and it was sincere and deep, must and should pass away; but the dreary void left by her perished love must abide; for this, time, instead of a cure, only brought further sorrow—for time would bring Robert home, and with Robert the fulfilment of her promise. Time would make her Robert's wife—terrible and sickening thought! Well might she moan again and again,

"I cannot bear it!"

"Do pray have some supper, Miss," urged Lucy, who was gently and noiselessly following her young mistress about, "pray do."

"No, no, nothing," said Mab; "but I cannot stay here," she added with a shudder, for she had entered Miss Lavinia's room, "not here; let me have a light in the drawing-room."

Lucy obeyed her to the letter; she brought a solitary wax-light, laid it on the round table in the centre of the room, and withdrew.

"And this is coming home!" thought Mab, looking around her—"this is coming home! Oh, God, help me!"

She had chosen the drawing-room, because it was the room in the whole house that appealed least to memory. But she found, after a while, that it was haunted too. Here Miss Lavinia had sat and sewed one still evening; here Robert, the day before their parting, had taken her in his arms, and said, half in jest, half in earnest,

"Be true to me, you little flirt, be true."

Here Mr. Ford had listened to her playing; and here, far back in the past, she had seen that pale Mrs. Ford, who died in the next room, and died asking her to forgive them.

"I suppose her brain was wandering," thought Mab; "poor lady! what had I to forgive?"

Then she thought of herself, her unknown and, probably, shameful parentage; then, by a rapid bound, her thoughts flew to O'Lally's Town, to the meetings by the sea-shore, to the parting in Shane's Country. In vain she tried to control her thoughts, and recall them—she could not; she felt the touch of his hand again, again she heard his voice, again her face burned beneath his look, or her heart felt riven asunder at their separation.

"And I am to marry Robert," she thought, wakening from her dream; "and he, I know it, he will marry Miss Gardiner."

Then hope, sweet syren hope, crept in. Would Robert, when he saw her so altered and so cold, urge an unwelcome suit? Maybe not. But what if, instead of returning speedily, he stayed years away? Youth, love, and the last rays of hope might perish in the meanwhile.

"There is no remedy," sighed Mab—"no remedy—nothing to do but to endure."

Ten struck. Carriages were rolling in the square; the mistress of the house next door was "at home." Mab recognised the notes of one of Strauss's favourite waltzes. It was the very one Miss Lavinia had played on the night of the party. She remembered Frederick Norton. Oh! how her heart smote her now for the pain she had given him! how she thought of his reproachful look! Ay, if she suffered she had deserved to suffer; but, if her sin was great, truly the punishment was severe.

Spite her fatigue, Mab felt no wish to sleep; but she knew that whilst she stayed up, Lucy would not go to bed; so with an effort, she rang, made the girl shut up the house, and retired to her own room. When Mab stood once more in that quiet

haven, reached after so dreary a storm and wreck, she felt as forlorn as the cast-away, thrown by the angry waves on an unknown shore. Ah! this was not the room she had left months before—the nest that had sheltered her childhood, the bower of her girlish dreams; that was peopled with a thousand treasures, with illusions, and bright hopes, fled forever—this was desolate, vacant and cold. Oh! it was not the same, or, if it were, what a change in her!

Her tears flowed, for the first time since her return; through her broken sobs, she heard the music next door, but she heard it without bitterness.

"God will help me to endure," she thought; "for without help I cannot. God will be strong for me, seeing that I am very weak."

CHAPTER II.

MR. FORD came home late in the evening, a few days after Mab's return. She did not see him until the next morning, and when they met they did not utter Miss Lavinia's name. They could not at first. Mab was utterly depressed, and Mr. Ford was strangely restless. He walked about the room, shaking his white hair, and muttering to himself broken ejaculations, which Mab could not understand.

"You have been ill, uncle," she said, passing her arm within his, and looking anxiously up in his face.

"Never mind, child; that does not matter, nothing would matter if you would only look better—it will come. The boys are gone, and all is gone—the end is coming. Mab, the end is coming."

"What end?" asked Mab.

He shook his white hair again, and did not reply.

Autumn yielded to winter; two months had passed away, and neither letter nor incident had come to break the monotony of Queen Square, when, a few days after Christmas, just as the new year was going to open, Mab, in looking over the newspaper one morning, read the following advertisement:

"On the twenty-seventh instant, at O'Lally's Town, John O'Lally, Esq., to Annie Gardiner, daughter of the late Anthony Gardiner."

Mab put down the paper, and felt very sick and cold.

"How long it is since we have heard from Robert!" ex-

claimed Mr. Ford, looking up from his share of the *Times* ;
“not since you came home, Mab.”

Mab did not answer. By the despair which had seized her, she knew now how strong her secret hope had been.

“I am afraid you are not well, my dear,” said Mr. Ford looking at her uneasily.

“I am not,” gasped Mab, dreadingly. “Oh, God, help me !—it is too much !—it is too much !”

Mr. Ford looked, as he felt, much alarmed, but he also looked utterly helpless.

“What is it ?—what can it be ?” he asked.

“I am ill,” answered Mab—“unwell, I mean—that is all. Do not trouble about me, uncle ; it has been coming on, it will go away again.”

She would, she could, say no more. But it did not go away, as Mr. Ford saw plainly. Mab grew thinner and paler daily, and was, at length, only the shadow of her former self. With all that, it was plain that nothing, save grief, ailed her. Mr. Ford vexed his brain with endeavouring to find out the cause of her trouble. He long thought she was fretting for his sister ; then for Robert ; then at the dulness of her life ; but every time he made an attempt to learn the truth or to enliven her, Mab shrank from his questions, or from his kind efforts, until Mr. Ford felt there was a secret between them.

“I am sorry I can do nothing for you, Mab,” he said, looking at her wistfully. “I know I cannot understand you, yet I would make you happy if I could.”

The humility of his tone smote Mab’s heart.

“Dear uncle,” she said, twining her arms around his neck, and looking tenderly up in his face, “you are too good to me, and I am ungrateful. But I will try and be better, if it were only for your sake—I will try and be cheerful and patient.”

“Will you, Mab ?”

“I will, indeed. From this day forward I mean to begin a new life, uncle.”

“We shall see, Mab,” he answered ; but he still thought, “There is something troubles her, and which she will not tell to me.”

Yet Mab spoke sincerely, and meant to keep her word. She schooled her heart, and told it to forget. What was Mr. O’Lally to her now ?—the husband of another woman.

“I have no right to remember him,” thought Mab. “He has forgotten me, or given me up very quickly, but he told me he

would do so. He is not the man to linger over a lost love ; I have no right to complain, and no right to remember him. I must think of Robert—Robert, who, from his silence, is assuredly coming home. I shall never be very happy with him, that cannot be ; but I esteem and like him, and God blesses the duty of a willing heart.”

Mab had spent several weeks in comparative calmness, when she, one day, received Mrs. Norton’s visit. Mab had not seen her since her return from Ireland, for Mrs. Norton had been visiting some of her friends in the country. She did not believe in scenery, and did not care for it, as we know, but she was certainly fond of motion.

Mab was sewing in the back parlour when Mrs. Norton was shown in. She sat by the window in the grey light of a dull January afternoon, pale, quiet, and calm. She rose slowly as her visitor entered the room, and put by her work, but her countenance remained dull and cold ; very lifeless and spiritless was her whole aspect.

“ We are going to have some snow,” said Mrs. Norton, sitting down ; “ don’t you think so, Miss Winter ? ” and she looked very hard at her.

Mab glanced at the fragment of sky enclosed by the window panes, and said,

“ Yes, she thought it would snow.”

“ The sun is shining in Australia, of course it is. What opinions have you got on climate, Miss Winter ? ”

“ None, Mrs. Norton. I am too ignorant to have opinions on such matters.”

“ Oh ! I have opinions on everything. How long is it since you heard from Robert ? ”

“ It is very long, indeed ; I was in Ireland then ; we think he is coming home.”

Mrs. Norton pursed up her lips, and looked bursting with indignation.

“ Coming home, indeed ! ” she said, impetuously ; “ well, I can let you into a bit of a secret, Miss Winter. Robert is not coming home.”

Mab’s pale face grew crimson ; but, though Mrs. Norton watched her narrowly, she could not say with what emotion.

“ I know it from two quarters,” she continued : “ from my brother-in-law, and from Robert himself. I never had any opinion of that young man,” she added, emphatically.

Mab looked at her fixedly, but put no questions.

"And now, are you brave—are you strong?" said Mrs. Norton, rising from her chair and showing much emotion, "can you bear bad news, cruel news, Miss Winter?"

"Yes," answered Mab, rising too, "I can bear anything—you may speak."

"Well, then, Robert and Nelly are married."

It would have been hard to say what Mab felt. She looked more incredulous than amazed at the tidings.

"It cannot be," she said at length, "Robert could not be such a traitor."

"Robert could be anything for money," hotly answered Mrs. Norton; "I always despised that plausible boy, and I always hated that little Judas, Nelly Norton. They are well mated, Miss Winter."

Mab did not answer. She was beginning to believe, and the blow was too great for speech.

"Here is his letter," angrily said Mrs. Norton, handing a closely written sheet to Mab. "He did not dare to write to you. I scorn him, I do!" she added with a curling lip.

Mab took the letter. It ran thus:

"MY DEAR AUNT,—When you receive this all will be over. Think of me as kindly as you can, and break the news to Mab—I dare not. I know Mr. Norton is writing to you, but I do not think he will tell you the fearful alternative he placed before me: ruin for my brothers and myself, or marriage with his daughter. Good, gentle, and loveable as Nelly is, I can say that I sacrificed myself to the welfare of my brothers. Honour, affection, duty bound me to Miss Winter. Did she really love me? I do not think so, but I do not wish to extenuate my error. Tell her that I throw myself on her mercy—it is all I can or dare do."

Mab read no more, though the letter did not end there. She crushed it in her hands and dropped it on the floor, and she said in the bitterness of her heart,

"There is no truth, there is no honour in man. They are wise who betray and break their faith, they are fools who keep their trust."

She left the parlour as she spoke. She went up to her own room; her brain felt on fire. Until then she had not known real despair, for she had laid herself as a victim on the altar of duty. But now duty was a dream, sacrifice a folly. She had thrown away her youth and her love in vain. She had tortured her own heart and deeply wounded Mr. O'Lally's for one whose

faith gold could buy. She had wept through bitter nights, and pined through days, for *that*. Oh! if Robert had but written earlier! If she had had but a few weeks! Oh! time—time! boon without price, now lost for ever to her!

She had thrown herself on her bed in the agony of her grief. A knock at her door roused her. She did not answer at first, but Mr. Ford's beseeching "Mab, my darling, let me in," was not to be resisted. She got up and drew back the bolt. His face was troubled and wild. He took her in his arms and pressed her convulsively to his bosom.

"I know all!" he gasped, "Robert is a villain! She has told me. Oh! Mab, Mab, my darling, what can I do for you? If money would but comfort you, you should have it, Mab, for you will be a rich woman yet, you will, though he did not know it."

"Money!" said Mab, drearily, "uncle, give me time, give me three months, and all will be well. You cannot; then what can you do for me?"

"Nothing," sadly said Mr. Ford, releasing her as he spoke, "that is true enough, Mab, I can do nothing for you. You gave me consolation and hope when you came to me a little child, as Alicia lay dead in her room—but I can do nothing for you."

"Oh! uncle," cried Mab, throwing her arms around his neck, "I cannot tell you all to-day, but this much I can tell you, I am not grieving for Robert—I did not love him."

"I am glad of it," cried Mr. Ford excitedly, "Robert is mean and despicable, he never was worthy of you—I am glad you did not care for him. He was incapable of appreciating you, my darling."

He trembled with indignation as he spoke. Mab tried to smile.

"I am not lucky, uncle," she said a little recklessly. "Why should I be? I am poor, a foundling, what is there in me to win love and keep it patient and true? It is just, it is natural that Robert should be faithless, that others should relinquish me on the first sign and seek happiness elsewhere. There never was but one true to me, and that is you, uncle—that is you," she added, again throwing her arms around his neck and laying her cheek to his.

Cruel embrace, and how he would have shrunk from it had he dared!

"All will be well yet, my love," he whispered, "all will be well yet."

"Oh! no, uncle," she sadly answered, "nothing will be well again—never, never!"

"You shall see," he whispered again; "come down with me and let me talk to you."

Mab yielded and went down. He took her into the drawing-room; he made her sit down in an arm-chair by the bright coal fire burning in the grate; he rang for tea, and when it came up he handed her a cup himself; he made her a small slice of toast with his own hands, and begged so hard that she ate it; and whilst he treated her thus like a sick child in need of dainties, he gave her consolation equally childish.

"You will see," he said, with a mysterious smile; "Robert did not know, the mean, sordid heart! he did not know how rich my little Mab would be yet. I have worked hard for it; and now it is over, or nearly over. Mab, guess how much money you have! I cannot show it you. I did not dare to keep it in the house—but guess."

"Uncle, do not talk so, your goodness breaks my heart."

"My goodness breaks her heart!" said Mr. Ford. "Oh! Mab, do not say that, if you do not want to break my heart. Mab," in a whisper, and bending to her ear, "you have fifteen thousand pounds."

"Uncle, I have nothing."

"Hush! You have more—you have houses and lands—an estate, Mab, a real estate."

He looked very wild. Mab grew frightened.

"Uncle," she cried, rising, "what is it, what ails you?"

"Hush!" said Mr. Ford, as the church clock struck seven. "I am late as it is, I must go. Oh! my darling, it is for your sake I leave you this evening."

He kissed her again and again.

"Uncle," cried Mab, "stay, stay, do not go—do not leave me. I am frightened."

But Mr. Ford shook his head, and put her away gently.

"Do not sit up," he said, "I may come in late. There is no fear—I am only going to see a sick man—old Captain George, sick and dying."

"Uncle, do not go, it is a dreary night; it is snowing—do not go!"

"Never mind the snow, child; I must go, death would not wait for me, and he would not see me earlier—good night, my darling."

He kissed her again, and was gone.

CHAPTER III.

It was a very dreary night. There were not many people out, and the snow lay thick and white on the ground. Mr. Ford turned his back to Holborn, and made his way through the wide and, at that hour, lonely streets which lie beyond Queen Square. He walked on for an hour and more; at length he reached a poor neighbourhood, with low houses, one story high, and courts and alleys of mean aspect. He entered one of these, groped his way, as best he could, to a tall house, higher than the rest, and rang the second floor bell. After some delay, a slipshod woman, wrapped in a plaid shawl, opened the door with a "Well, sir!" that sounded imperative and sharp.

"Captain George," said Mr. Ford.

The woman looked exasperated.

"And what is Captain George to me?" she said angrily, "that I should be rung for so night and day, in my sleep and out of my sleep, for the likes of him."

"I am sorry to have troubled you," mildly said Mr. Ford; "I have never been here before, and I thought, from Giachino's account, that Captain George rented the second floor."

"He is in an attic, sir," said the woman with profound contempt, "in the back attic, and I am surprised that Mrs. Brand would let him have even that—I am. But if you'll come in out of the cold, sir, I am going up-stairs again, and you can have the benefit of my candle."

Mr. Ford accepted this liberal offer, and followed her up-stairs. When they had reached the second floor, the lady in the plaid shawl condescended to hold her light so that he might grope his way up the attic staircase, and, kindly informing him that Captain George's door was the one right opposite him, she re-entered her own rooms and left him in sudden darkness. It did not last long; in answer to his knock, a voice from within said, "Come in," and opening the door, Mr. Ford entered.

It was a small, bare room. On the table stood a bottle, in the neck of which a candle had been set; it burned unsnuffed, and lit a dreary scene. On a mattress on the floor lay the once luxurious and always comfortable Captain George, and on the edge of that miserable bed sat a pale, sad-looking young man, with Italian features, the Giachino of old-times, whom Mr. and Mrs. George had befriended, and who had clung to them with

canine fidelity. Through him Mr. Ford had received the message that brought him here this evening.

The sick man was sleeping now, at least his heavy lids were closed, and Giachino held up his forefinger to enjoin silence on Mr. Ford; but Captain George's eyes opened wide, and at once caught sight of the visitor.

"It's you, Ford, is it?" he said faintly; "I hardly thought you'd come, though it was for old acquaintance sake. Take a seat; Giachino, hand the gentleman a seat."

Without troubling Giachino so far, Mr. Ford helped himself to the only chair in the room, and, looking down at his old acquaintance, he scanned his hollow cheek and sunken eyes.

"Sad changes, eh!" said Captain George, sighing, "sad changes, Ford. You heard of poor Mrs. George. It was my death-blow, Ford, my death-blow. She had been ailing long; we both nursed her, Giachino and I, and the poor fellow is as tender as a woman, but it would not do. We could not give her the comforts she had been used to, and Mrs. George could not live without comfort. She went off like a baby in Giachino's arms. And everything has gone from bad to worse since then. The dumb creatures pined and pined away one by one—one after another they went. I do believe they missed Mrs. George. And now they are all gone. The last bird died yesterday, and Captain George is going on his last journey, eh! Ford, his last journey."

"Is there anything you want?—anything I can do for you?" asked Mr. Ford.

"Nothing; Giachino will go back to his own country when I am in my grave—and Captain George will want nothing, and no one then. I thought to ask little Never Mind to take care of a bird for me, but it is provided for. And Giachino wants no one. Poor boy, he will have a good riddance of me. He has paid dear for that lame foot of his. Have you not, Giachino?"

"It was all as it should be," sententiously said Giachino.

"Do just listen to him, Ford! Why, Mrs. George might have starved but for Giachino, and I know the poor wretch will beggar himself to give me a decent funeral. I know he will."

There was a tremor in Captain George's voice as he said this. Giachino's faithful love was the only weak spot left in that heart long hardened by inveterate corruption.

"And have you nothing to say to me?" asked Mr. Ford, unable to repress his nervous impatience.

"An old fox, an old fox!" said Captain George, with the old

impudent twinkle in his eye. "Why, yes," he added, slowly, "I *may* have something to say to you."

There was rather a long pause, during which Mr. Ford waited patiently, and Giachino said his beads with perfect apathy to all that was passing around him.

"Some care for the opinion of the world, and some don't," said Captain George, in a hard, deliberate voice; "I cannot say I ever did. Whenever I had money the world went on well with me; and when I had none, it kicked me aside, and treated me as any old worn out cab-horse. As to what it will do or say when I am gone, I really do not care at all. Now, there was James; he was all for having the world's good word, and he got it; but did the world prevent him from being burned alive?—that's what I want to know."

"He left you some money," said Mr. Ford, with much bitterness.

"Why, yes, there were a few thousands—a very few thousands of that inheritance. Well, I made short work of them."

"And is that all you have got to say?" excitedly asked Mr. Ford; "is it all?"

"No—not all. I know what you mean, and I am coming to it. You see James and I got a very fair inheritance some twelve or fourteen years ago, a very fair inheritance."

"I know—I know!" indignantly exclaimed Mr. Ford, nervously clasping his trembling hands.

"Come, old boy, don't go on so—you had five hundred pounds."

"I did not keep one penny of them," cried Mr. Ford, excitedly; "I threw them back to you."

"Ay, but when they had made hundreds and hundreds—you were always double, Ford, always."

"As God hears me, neither I nor mine have touched a farthing of that accursed money!" cried Mr. Ford, his voice rising high in the passion of the moment; "I worked, and we lived by my labour. The money brought in thousands—thousands, and I have them all for her—all; can you say as much, Captain George?"

"No, old fellow," was the candid answer; "every shilling of that money that I could touch is gone, and gone for good, too; but that is not the question. You will easily understand, if you do not know it, that there might be property we could not get hold of, property which would have been our young relative's had she lived. You understand?"

"I do—I do."

"Well, there's an estate, not a large one, but worth something."

"I know all about it," interrupted Mr. Ford; "and it should have been done long ago, could I have proved her title and her identity."

"That's the rub," said Captain George, making a wry face; "but I always had a liking for that little thing. I once thought the papers might be useful, and bring in something, though James, who was sharp, said no, and it must not be done. I did not try; for I got information that convinced me it would just be putting a halter round my own neck, neither more nor less. So I burned the best part of the papers; and to say the truth, those that remain—and they remained by chance—are not worth much. But one can try; and I always had a liking for her, and what will it hurt me that they call Captain George a thief and a rascal when he is in his coffin, if he gets one. Not that!" said Captain George, puffing out a breath, "and perhaps she will remember him more kindly for it—not that it will matter much, we are not likely to meet her in the next world, are we?"

"Why so?" asked Mr. Ford; "why so, Captain George?"

"Why, surely we shall not be where she will go. No—no, it is all fair play—fair play. I have had my fling—fair play. Well, here is the little packet," he continued, drawing forth a creased and dirty roll of papers from beneath his pillow; "you will find enough there to settle the case, I believe."

"Perhaps you had better explain," said Mr. Ford, taking the papers with a trembling hand; "I do not know the whole story."

"Then find it out," angrily replied Captain George. "What! can't a man do a dirty thing but he must rake it up on his death-bed? You are as bad as Giachino there, who wants to bring me a priest to confess me. Confess!" added Captain George, with a ghastly laugh, "I wonder how long it would take me now to remember all I have done in my day! A week, a fortnight, and I may not have ten hours to live."

"But you can repent," eagerly said Mr. Ford; "you can repent, Captain George."

"Tain't easy," candidly answered Captain George; "take my word for it, John Ford, repentance is dreadfully slow work. No—no," he added, with a significant nod, "as they live, men die. Fair play—all fair play. I dare say I should begin it all again if I had time and opportunity; and so would you," he added, with another ghastly smile at Mr. Ford, "so would you."

Mr. Ford shook, and stared at Captain George.

"I would not," he said, at length; "I was led into it."

"So we all are, old fellow. Some by one thing, some by another—most by money; but you would be led into it again."

"I have repented bitterly," said Mr. Ford; "my life has been a burden and a misery to me. God knows, the meanest wretch that starves in the streets is happier than I have been."

Captain George looked at him, then turned his face to the wall, and muttered between his teeth:

"That man was always a sneak. Now, I say it is fair play—fair play."

Mr. Ford rose.

"Is there anything you wish for?" he asked.

"Rum; the doctor says I can have what I like."

"And is that what you think of?" exclaimed Mr. Ford; "have you no other care, no fear?"

"Have done with your preaching," wrathfully interrupted Captain George; "I will stand any amount of it from Giachino there, for if he preaches, God knows and I know the poor lad lives up to it; but from you, John Ford, it is too much. Send me the rum if you like, and let that be all."

"I have deserved this," groaned Mr. Ford; "I have deserved this; even that abject dying wretch can tax me with it—I have deserved it all."

"A sneak—a regular sneak!" said Captain George, with unutterable contempt, as Mr. Ford turned to the door, and groped his way downstairs.

The next morning Mr. Ford left Mab. He would not tell her where he was going, and she little suspected that the place of which the memory both bitter and sweet ever haunted her, was the goal of Mr. Ford's journey.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was gloom at O'Lally's Town, and sorrow, which Mab little suspected.

"They are walking together by the sea-shore," thought Mab, on a bright sunny morning, mild as spring. They were not. Mr. O'Lally was sitting in an upper room of the old house, looking at his two sisters. Miss Emily sat by the window—it was securely grated; she looked sullenly and sadly at the sky. Miss Ellen sat on the floor; her hands were clasped around her knees;

she was laughing and nodding. The hereditary curse had fallen upon them at last. They had received the taint with their father's blood, and their case was helpless.

It was a very dreary picture.

Their madness indeed was gentle. No violence, no unseemly speech, no dismal shrieks, were there to appal faithful love; but it was hard to see it daily, and Mr. O'Lally did not know which was hardest to bear, Emily's sullen silence, or Ellen's foolish gladness.

A tap at the door disturbed Mr. O'Lally's sad contemplation; he rose at once, for he knew it was his wife, who did not dare to show herself, and Miss Emily knew it too; she gave an uneasy look around the room, and frowned. Her brother went up to her, and kissed her.

"Good-bye," she said, "I am going away. Good-bye, Emily."

But Emily remained mute. Cold, lifeless was her look. Neither tenderness nor endearment could rouse her now.

"Good-bye, Ellen," said Mr. O'Lally, turning to his other sister.

Ellen nodded and laughed.

"I see you," she said, and it was all her answer.

Mr. O'Lally looked at the nurse, who was sitting in a remote corner of the room, sewing quietly.

"Be kind to them, Mrs. Saunders," he said, in a tone of entreaty.

Mrs. Saunders looked up with a smile. She had a calm and gentle face, that seemed to insure kindness, though her blue eyes bespoke firmness.

"Of course, sir, I shall be kind," she replied.

Mr. O'Lally sighed; he could not bear to surrender his two sisters to any authority, however gentle, but the matter was beyond remedy; he gave them another look, a look full of love and sorrow, then went out on the landing, where his wife was waiting. Her white forehead was clouded, her dark eyes had a look of discontent.

"Annie, what is the matter?" asked her husband; his tone was kind and almost tender, but her look did not soften, her features did not relax.

"Why must I not go in?" she asked, with something like resentment, "what ails your sister Emily? What have I done that she should hate me?"

"Would you reproach her with her sad want of reason?" asked Mr. O'Lally.

"I reproach her with nothing. I only ask what I have done?"

They were going down-stairs. Mr. O'Lally did not answer till they reached the last step; he then looked at his wife with something like displeasure.

"We must not speak on this subject, Annie," he said; "my sisters are my sore point."

His lip quivered slightly; partly with emotion, partly with resentment.

"I meant no harm," quickly replied his wife, "but it is bitter to feel myself unjustly hated."

Mr. O'Lally did not reply: he took down his hat and prepared to go out; his wife, who was watching him closely, said, in a tone between defiance and humility:

"Am I not to go with you this morning?"

"Why should you not?"

"Because you do not ask me."

"Annie, what makes you so submissive?"

He said it playfully. She did not answer, but stood before him, pouting, with downcast eyes, and, as he felt, looking very handsome.

"You know," he continued, drawing her arm within his, and leading her out into the garden, "that I am no domestic despot, Annie, and have no wish to be one; I like gentleness, it is true, but it is not that I wish to rule."

"Gentleness!" repeated his wife after him, and stopping short in the garden path. "Gentleness—ay, when it has light eyes and golden hair—like Miss Winter."

Oh! unwise and imprudent speech! If there was a face Mr. O'Lally wished to forget, it was Mab's. If there was one he wished to love as well as admire, it was Annie's. But as she spoke there floated past him a vision both bright and sweet. He saw the fair-haired girl, and her radiant look and smile up-raised to his, as on that morning when she came to him beaming with joy that her aunt was saved. His brow flushed and his blood flowed more quickly for a moment, then he turned to his wife, cold, haughty, displeased, and he cast on her a reproving eye, that no longer saw beauty in her face.

"What!" she exclaimed, "is that, too, a sore point, on which I must not touch?"

It may be that if Mr. O'Lally had, before or after marriage,

taken his wife into his confidence, and told her the history of his love for Mab, she would not have been so jealous or so resentful; but he had not chosen to give Mab's secret into her keeping, and his silence was an offence she could not forgive. He resumed his self-possession, smiled as she uttered her last taunt, and replied, with every appearance of unconcern:

"I am not sure that Miss Winter was very gentle; but you are right enough, Annie, she was, and no doubt is still, exquisitely pretty."

They soon reached the end of the garden, where his horse was waiting for him, and there they parted, as usual—he to go on to his business, she to return to the house; but Mrs. O'Lally did not do so at once. She stood and looked after her husband, who never turned back, and there was more bitterness in her heart than love in her eyes. Was this what she had toiled for so long and so patiently? To be thus taunted with the beauty of a preferred rival. For she was a rival; she was sure of it. No one had told her so, his sisters had tried to deny it, but she knew it by that unerring instinct of jealousy and love. Yes, he had loved her, and something had parted them, and she had had what remained of his heart, and was expected to be glad of that remnant. He had slighted her love for years, and when he took it at last, he was neither humble nor penitent.

In a mood of sullen discontent, Mrs. O'Lally at last turned back to the house. As she did so her eyes sought two grated windows in the upper story, and rested upon them with a moody look. Why was she balked there, too? Why was she hated where she once was loved? She had done her best to please, and must have failed somehow, or Miss Emily would not always turn from her with detestation, in her folly, and Miss Ellen with indifference.

"Everything and everyone is against me," she thought, in the bitterness of her heart.

She entered the house, and, after crossing the hall, the sitting-room. She found the door of this apartment open, and understood why it was so, on seeing a gentleman standing in one of the windows with his back to her. She stood and looked at him with a beating heart. It was not Doctor Flinn, who was rarely seen at O'Lally's Town since she had become its mistress; could it be anyone come on her husband's affairs?—they were in a critical position, and she knew it. She made a slight stir, the stranger turned round, and displayed the homely features of Mr. John Ford.

Medusa and all her serpents would not have proved a more baleful sight than was this to Annie Gardiner. Mr. Ford saw her dark eyes dilate, and her small hands clench, and, blunt though his perceptions often were, he was alive to these symptoms of dislike and fear, and he felt confounded to witness them. The words of greeting and congratulation died on his lips, and he stood and stared at his young hostess in mute amazement. She was the first to recover. She did so with a sudden cordiality, which, though well assumed, could not lull Mr. Ford's suspicions. In vain, holding out her hand, she welcomed him with her most winning smile, and addressed him with her most fluent grace. Mr. Ford remained cool, and on his guard. But Mrs. O'Lally would be amiable.

"You have missed my husband by five minutes," she said; "however, he will be in for dinner; besides, this is a visit, not a call, of course. And how is dear Miss Winter? As pretty and as gay as ever, I trust. I hope she received our cards, though I never got any token that she did so."

"My niece is a little out of health," slowly answered Mr. Ford.

"Then, why did you not let her have the benefit of our mild climate?" asked Mrs. O'Lally, sitting down by him with engaging familiarity. "Mr. O'Lally and I would have been so happy to see her again."

But in vain she looked at him keenly; Mr. Ford, who knew and suspected nothing, could not betray Mab's secret. Mrs. O'Lally changed her ground. She spoke of her sisters-in-law, of their afflicted state; and Mr. Ford heard her with concern, but, from the tone of his remarks, it was plain that his cousins had no part in the present visit. He came for Mr. O'Lally, then—what could he want with him? Mrs. O'Lally became confidential. She sighed, her husband had many trials, she feared he was not duly appreciated; her own friends, instead of supporting him, had turned against him. Mr. Ford heard her with great attention; but it was clear as day that Mr. O'Lally's hard battle with the world was not of much more personal importance to Mr. Ford than the Chinese War. No, it was certain he had not come for that.

What, then, had he come for? Mrs. O'Lally tried to discover Mr. Ford's errand during the whole of that long day. She was subtle, keen, and persevering, yet she was completely baffled. Mr. Ford did not even seem aware of her efforts.

It was late when Mr. O'Lally came home. His reception of

his self-invited guest was not warm, but it was courteous enough to satisfy Mr. Ford. At once, and with a thoroughly unembarrassed manner, Mr. O'Lally asked after Mab.

"She is not at all well," replied Mr. Ford, with a look full of concern; "I am afraid Ireland did not agree with her. She has never been the same since she came back."

"Miss Winter received a great shock whilst she was here."

"She did; but it looks more than a shock. I used to call her my sunbeam, and my sunbeam is under a cloud now."

Mr. O'Lally seemed satisfied with this, but his wife resumed the subject at dinner-time.

"How sad it was for Miss Winter to be so depressed!" kindly said Annie.

"Well, you see she was used to more society than she has now," replied Mr. Ford. "But her aunt is dead, and the boys are gone, and, as my eldest son, Robert, has married his partner's daughter, and his brothers are with him, my dear little Mab is not likely to get society just yet."

There was nothing in this speech which Mrs. O'Lally would have noticed, for her suspicions had not rested on Robert Ford, if she had not been struck with the change which passed across her husband's face. He was raising a glass to his lips when Mr. Ford began, he kept it thus while he spoke; when Mr. Ford ceased Mr. O'Lally put down the glass untasted, and turned extremely pale. His wife looked at him, with burning eyes, across the table; but he neither saw nor heeded the look, and, for once, his self-possession would not return at his bidding. Mr. Ford stared at him, then at Mrs. O'Lally, and felt, with some surprise, that he was the cause of their singular emotion.

Everything he saw and heard startled and perplexed him; besides, he felt ill at ease, and longed to have his unpleasant errand over.

"Mr. O'Lally," he said, breaking a silence his host shewed no wish to interrupt, "I have not yet told you what brings me here. If both you and Mrs. O'Lally will do me the favour of listening to me after dinner, I shall have time, I hope, to explain to you how and why I must needs add to the cares and anxieties which already press upon you."

"Not this evening, Mr. Ford," said Mr. O'Lally, rising; "I made to-day a business appointment, which I must keep."

"Must you go?" asked his wife.

"I must, indeed."

He bade them both good evening, and left at once; his last words were:

"I shall not be home till late."

With some annoyance and uneasiness, Mr. Ford found himself left alone with Mrs. O'Lally. He longed to escape from her, but saw no means of doing so, and indeed she gave him no time. With ill-disguised eagerness, she asked if he would not go to the sitting-room; and no sooner was he there than she began.

"Come, Mr. Ford," she said, playfully, "I know more than you suspect."

Mr. Ford looked uneasy; but he was on his guard, and would not answer.

"What is all this great mystery for?" she resumed, with a soft, low laugh; "I know quite well what ails Miss Winter."

Mr. Ford's wary look became one of deep surprise.

"She was engaged to your eldest son," continued Annie; "and he proved faithless and married another—that is it, is it not?"

"Robert is a villain!" cried Mr. Ford, growing excited, as he always did when this subject was broached; "a sordid, dishonourable villain, who sold himself for money!"

In his passion he rose, and began walking about the room in his old way, with his hands thrust into his pockets. He thought of Mab's wrongs, but Annie thought of her husband. The past rose clear before her.

"So that is it," she said, in a low, hard voice; "that is it, and that was your errand—to tell him she was free; pity you came so late, Mr. Ford."

She laughed very drearily.

"I don't understand," faltered Mr. Ford, who, alas, was beginning to understand but too well.

"You do; and allow me to ask what keeps you here. Mr. O'Lally is married—you can have nothing to say to him now."

Mr. Ford sat down, and leaning back in his chair, he groaned aloud.

"Oh! my darling, my darling!—I see it all now. Oh! God help me! what a curse have we been to her—father and son. Oh! God help me!"

His grief was so sudden and so vehement, that, blinded as she was by jealousy, Annie saw she had given knowledge and acquired none. No; this was not Mr. Ford's errand. She grew much calmer, and stood by his side, until he raised his troubled face once more.

"I never knew—I never guessed it," he moaned: "and now her heart is broken. Oh! why did I send my darling here?"

"I am sorry to have pained you," said Annie, gently; "but I confess I thought your business was about her; and you can scarcely wonder that I should resent it."

"It is about her," replied Mr. Ford, half angrily, for he had never liked Annie; and he almost hated her now that he beheld in her his darling Mab's rival.

"Then what is it?" eagerly asked Mrs. O'Lally, "what is it? Do tell me, Mr. Ford."

Her dark eyes were singularly keen, they looked as if they longed to pick the secret out of his brain, and Mr. Ford felt it, and his resentment rose higher.

"I will not tell you," was his abrupt answer.

"Then you want to be my death!" she cried, passionately; "oh! Mr. Ford, have mercy on me—have a little mercy! Leave this house before he comes back. Whatever your errand may be, leave it; write; a letter will not do half the mischief—not half. Do not think me mad; he has loved her—he loves her still!" she cried, her voice rising; "did I not see him? and did not you, when you spoke of your son's marriage? Did he not turn pale?—he whose countenance never changes, never yields to emotion! I know what he thought. He thought—'I have been in a hurry, I might have had her.' He thought that; and I, his wife, saw it and looked on. Have mercy on me, Mr. Ford! I do not know what brings you—but I know it will be my ruin—I know it!"

"My errand may indeed turn against you," answered Mr. Ford, affected by her vehement entreaties; "but not as you think. It may make you a poorer woman, but it surely will not lessen—God forbid that it should!—the regard of your husband."

Mrs. O'Lally seemed unable to comprehend his meaning.

"A poorer woman!" she said; "how so?"

"I cannot speak unless in your husband's presence."

"Will you mention her?"

"I must—I cannot help it."

She clasped her hands in despair.

"And so you will ruin and undo me," she moaned, "after what I have told you—you will do it. And he will hear about her, and from her. Where is he now? He had no appointment—none. He is out in the dreary night, out by the shore, thinking of her, calling her, and cursing the day that tied him to me."

"God help you, poor young thing!" compassionately said Mr. Ford; "I cannot."

"Say you will not," cried Mrs. O'Lally, rising from the chair on which she had sunk—"say you will not! May the mercy you have shown me be that you will yourself receive some day."

She left the room as she spoke.

CHAPTER V.

MR. O'LALLY, his wife, and Mr. Ford, were sitting together in the old dark room on the ground floor. Mr. O'Lally looked cool and calm; his wife's hands were clasped tightly together, and her eyes were fastened on Mr. Ford, who was speaking.

"It is now thirteen years since my wife died; some months before her death I found a child at my door. I took her in and adopted her. The world, my wife herself thought she was mine, but she was not. I did not know her real story for some time; when I knew it, redress was out of my power. I had to look on and see the wrong done, for there was a great wrong. She was an orphan and an heiress, the rightful owner of property which could not be contested, and which was shared by two brothers on her supposed death. They enjoyed it for years, and at length squandered and devoured it."

"And what have we to do with this romantic history of Miss Winter's?" sharply asked Mrs. O'Lally.

"Her name is not Mab Winter," replied Mr. Ford, in a tone as sharp, "but Mary O'Flaherty."

Mr. O'Lally had been expecting this conclusion from the first; his wife was taken by surprise, and exclaimed,

"Mary O'Flaherty is dead, sir!"

"There were two: one, said to have died young, and who was left at my door—the other, who died a few years back in America: they were cousins."

"And why am I to be always haunted with a Mary O'Flaherty—living or dead?" angrily asked Mrs. O'Lally, turning her pale face full on Mr. Ford; "what brings you here with that name and that story?"

"Justice," he calmly answered; "of all that should have been hers, what is left now? this house and this land."

"Our property—thanks—" derisively said Annie; "what else?"

Mr. Ford did not answer. Mr. O'Lally spoke for the first time.

"What proof of your assertions do you bring?" he asked

mistrustfully, for his impression was that Mr. Ford, having learned Mab's likeness to the dead Mary, had built up this story upon it. Mr. O'Lally believed him guilty of abstracting the five hundred pounds, and was not the man to forget such a transgression.

"When I came here three years ago," answered Mr. Ford, "I came to prove Mab's rights. I failed. The knowledge I acquired was broken and unsatisfactory. I need not tell you, Mr. O'Lally, that the Georges had to prove Mab's death before they could touch her inheritance. The way they managed it was this. They got a consumptive child and called her Mary O'Flaherty, and when she died they got the property. They could not have done so, had they not been abetted by the relative who, on her mother's death, went and fetched her from France. He had an interest in serving them, for her decease put him in possession of this very house and land."

Annie's eyes flashed.

"My father!" she said indignantly.

"I can't help it," doggedly replied Mr. Ford; "nor indeed can you. He did it, and without him the Georges could have done nothing. If he had been faithful to the child, she would have been invulnerable; but he was her heir, and he betrayed her. He gave her up to them, and let them do as they pleased. I daresay he never knew what had become of her, but he knew she was legally dead; and being her heir on the Irish side, as the Georges were on the English through her aunt Mary, he got this property."

"Mr. Ford, assertion is not proof," here observed Mr. O'Lally.

"Of course not. Well, I found it very difficult to get proof. I knew the story; I could follow it as it were, but proof failed. Moreover, it had been so managed that the story had only one weak point, and that was very frail, I am bound to confess. I discovered easily enough the medical man who had attended on the false Mary O'Flaherty, and I got him to describe her to me. I have a letter in which he does so, and his description is that she had a dark complexion and black eyes. Now, Mr. O'Lally, I know you met the real Mary when she was a child—what was she like?"

"Fair, by all means; but allow me to say, that a medical man's testimony, after several years have passed, is of very small value."

"I know it, and never made the least use of it. I hoped,

indeed, to confirm it by discovering where Mrs. O'Flaherty had died; for in the same letter this medical man mentions the child's mother as living. Now, I know that she died before the child was in the hands of Mr. Gardiner, and that her death had caused all the mischief; but the same interest I had in seeking to know had made them careful to conceal, and long and anxiously as I looked, the clue I had hoped for ever escaped me. But you want proof. Here it is. From a mass of papers given me by Captain George on his death-bed, I have extracted this, the only one of any worth, and here it is, as I said. Mr. Gardiner and the Georges were not friends, Mr. Gardiner wanted to borrow money, which Mr. James George would not lend. Mr. Gardiner wrote to Captain George in the following terms:

"Tell your brother that I have helped him to a magnificent inheritance, and that if he exasperates me, I will ruin myself to ruin him. I give you fair warning, for I owe you no grudge. Tell him I have proofs which will not compromise me."

"I do not know whether this letter produced any effect," continued Mr. Ford, folding up the letter once more; "I confess it is the only one of that kind in my hands."

"A solitary forgery," scornfully said Annie.

"It may be a forgery as you say, ma'am," composedly replied Mr. Ford, "but the forger in that case lived in this part of Ireland, for, false or real, that letter still bears the postmark of the neighbouring post town."

Annie bit her lip and looked at her husband. Mr. O'Lally had remained very passive. He now spoke.

"Mr. Ford," he said, "I have heard you out patiently. What other proofs have you to give?"

"None of much weight, I confess."

"But this is no proof on which you can expect me to give up property which is mine by purchase. No court of law would allow your claims. I grant that this letter was genuine, if you like. What of it? Mr. Gardiner was eccentric and resentful. He may have written it, and yet there may not be a word of truth in it."

"I understand your meaning," replied Mr. Ford; "and as to a court of law, surely you do not think that if I meant to use one against you I should be here! No, I know that in law I could throw doubt upon you and make you suffer in fair name, but I know too I should not get an acre of this land—not one. The case would break down. If I came here it was because I had no right to stay away. I came to tell you what I knew, and

leave it to your conscience to keep or surrender the stolen property, of which you unfortunately became the possessor."

"You expect my husband to give up his property on the authority of forged documents?" asked Mrs. O'Lally.

But Mr. Ford looked impenetrable to insult.

"I expect him to have a conscience, ma'am," he said phlegmatically, "no more."

Mr. O'Lally frowned.

"Mr. Ford," he said, "my wife is right in one thing: this is no proof on which to surrender what is really mine."

"And what more proof do you want?" asked Mr. Ford; "is she not the very image of her cousin, a likeness which struck you all, and which she mentioned to me on her return? Is she not like the child you knew? Why, she even remembers you, though, I confess it, very vaguely. When she first came to us, she spoke of a dark youth, and she called him *he*; and she even spoke once to me of a game styled 'Limerick.'"

"She did!" cried Mr. O'Lally, thrown off his guard, as memory suddenly called back the childish incident.

"And is it possible you do not see through this?" asked his wife. "Mr. Ford kindly told you that he came here three years ago to find out by what means he could dispossess you. He procured information, but, not knowing how to make it useful, he sent his sister and Miss Winter. The likeness to Mary O'Flaherty was un hoped-for good fortune. But more was needed. Old childish reminiscences were wormed out of your sisters, and now you see the use made of them. Is it possible, I say, you do not see through it?"

"Madam!" hotly said Mr. Ford, "I have had patience with you—for I can understand the feelings of a wife and a daughter—but I will not allow you to insult Mab. She is ignorant of the truth—ignorant of my errand; and to this day calls and thinks herself Mab Winter."

"I am glad to hear it, though not surprised," said Mr. O'Lally; "I should think it strange indeed if Miss Winter had any share in the step you have taken, for, whether your assertions be true or not, I agree with my wife, your proceedings have not been frank. The whole story you relate is strange, and I warn you that I will sift it to the very bottom. I will not surrender house and land, and my wife's father's good name to boot, without a struggle."

"Do your best, you will disprove nothing that I have said," said Mr. Ford, rising; "I have convinced others who had not

the same cause to be sceptical as you have, it is true, for Mary O'Flaherty's brother had no inheritance at stake. I went and found him in America, hoping he might give me some information, but he knew nothing, yet he believed me, though he never saw Mab. But he was very sore against you, Mr. O'Lally—and not without cause, if his story be true. You made love to his sister—but she was poor, and you deserted her. You need not look so desperately angry, as it is nothing to me; and take pattern on me, Mr. O'Lally; for the last hour I have heard myself insulted with a patience I did not know was in me. However, that is neither here nor there. I was in America when my sister died, and Mr. O'Flaherty told me his story, or rather his sister's. It seems he had not known it very long, but looking over her papers he found a letter of yours, endorsed by her—so he told me. He put it under an envelope, and bade me give it you with a message which is bitter enough. 'Tell him,' he said, '—but I will not repeat the rest,' added Mr. Ford, breaking off, "for I did not promise to do so—though I did promise to give you the letter—and here it is."

He handed him a sealed packet as he spoke. Mr. O'Lally took it haughtily enough.

"I perceive, Mr. Ford," he said, "that none of my affairs are to remain secret to you. You claim my property; you attack my late father-in-law's honour, and you are kind enough to give me your opinion of my conduct in a very private matter of mine which occurred several years ago."

Mr. Ford did not reply. He was looking at Mrs. O'Lally. She sat bending forward, her hands clenched, her eyes fixed on the sealed letter in her husband's hand. Mr. O'Lally saw it too, and, looking at her with some wonder, he gently asked,

"What ails you, Annie?"

"Do you love me?" she replied.

"I hope so."

"Then prove it. Cast away that letter brought by one who came to despoil us of our home, and who would poison it if he could. Trample it under your feet with the scorn it deserves, and bid him begone!"

She had risen, and she spoke with a passion of mingled love and scorn that made her very beautiful. Never had her husband seen that light in her eyes, that bloom on her cheeks, that glow in her whole aspect. He was dazzled and moved, but he was not conquered. He passed his arm around her, and leading her away to the window, he tried to soothe her.

"My dearest Annie," he said, "be calm, and have some faith in your husband. That poor girl has been dead years, and long before she died my love, if ever it was love, was killed by her fickleness. Do not wrong yourself so far as to be jealous of her, and know that, even when I preferred her, my better judgment bade me prefer you."

The room was large, and Mr. O'Lally spoke too low for Mr. Ford to hear him, but he heard his wife's reply. Looking up in her husband's face, she said in tones of the most ardent entreaty,

"If you love me do not read that letter—you preferred her once—years ago—well, I confess I am jealous of that. Gratify me. Ah! remember," she added with a passionate outbreak, "remember that I have suffered very keenly—and gratify me—for once—I shall never trouble, never tease you again—not even about that other Mary O'Flaherty."

She spoke with a persuasive tenderness that moved him very much, that moved him all the more that he had not married her for love, and that their short married life had known many storms—but he did not yield, nor feel tempted to do so.

"Annie, be just," he said; "my honour is attacked, and an insulting message is sent to me. That is all through some strange error which I can clear I do not doubt; for Richard O'Flaherty is not a bad man—but I will clear that error, Annie. It must not be said of your husband that he was so base as to wrong an innocent girl."

He put her away and walked back to Mr. Ford. She remained where he left her: she stood there cold and pale, hardening herself to meet her inevitable destiny. Mr. O'Lally tore open the envelope, and a square letter with a red seal fell out, a letter which, as it seemed to Mr. Ford, he had seen before.

Mr. O'Lally recognized it too; he looked at it; two faint lines were traced in pencil on the back of the envelope; they were in a writing once familiar. "When I read this," they said, "I felt my heart was broken."

Mr. O'Lally hastily unfolded the letter and read its contents: they were brief, and in his hand-writing. Yes, he could not doubt it: that cruel, cold intimation, that he had reflected, and that all was over between him and Mary O'Flaherty, had been written under his own hand and seal. She had acted upon his wishes, complained to none, and borne her hard lot in silence, until her heart broke. The mist which had so long clouded the past rolled away from Mr. O'Lally's view. That first Mary, then, though so easily deceived, and too easily acting on her

resentment, was not fickle or faithless. If he was blameless she was innocent. Malice alone had divided them—malice, which must also have been domestic treason.

Calmly enough he turned to his wife. Her look, her attitude, both proclaimed her guilty.

"It is false!" she said, forestalling attack, "it is false!"

"Annie, Annie, God forgive you!" said her husband with deep sorrow. "Oh! how could you do it? What was ruin, what were house and land to this?"

He sat down like one overwhelmed by grief. That was his first feeling; but when he remembered the story of that letter—how Mr. Ford had found it in the study where he had seen her: how, to disarm his testimony of its value, she had not scrupled to cast upon him the ignominy of theft; when he remembered too, that if he had been wildly loved, he had been shamefully duped and deceived, bitter resentment conquered grief. He rose, he looked at her, and she knew his face and his eye too well not to read in both her destiny. It may be that, according to the theory of love, Mr. O'Lally's wife ought never to have loved him more than in that moment. But if she was the guilty daughter of a guilty father, she came of a proud and vindictive race, that had never forgiven humiliation, even though merited. Her face took the fatal beauty of the Medusa as she looked at her husband. Manifold were her wrongs. She had loved him years, and he had never returned her passion. Twice before her face, under her very eyes, he had loved those two Marys, who both had proved her undoing. He had married her for ambition, and though she could not tax him with unkindness, she did with indifference. And now, this very day, what had he not done? He had humbled her in the presence of that stranger who had come to claim her inheritance for a hated rival, and who could go back to her with the story of her disgrace. She forgot her own deep guilt, and spoke with the resentment of an injured woman.

"You may spare yourself the trouble of speaking," she said, addressing her husband, "you married me for my money, and I scorn it too much not to leave it to you—keep it!" she added with a gesture full of disdain. "But when I leave this house, which once was mine, which you have made hateful to me, and which you are going to surrender to an adventuress, I leave it with a revenge you little suspect, but shall know some day."

She walked haughtily to the door, opened it, and closed it again as calmly as if it had not for ever divided her from her

husband. A deep silence followed her departure. Mr. Ford stood amazed and aghast at the ruin he had caused ; Mr. O'Lally smiled bitterly at his wife's parting address. The last illusion was gone. She had never loved him—never. It had been passion and pride, and a wish to prevail over him, but never had it been love. And even if it had been, did he not feel in his soul that he scorned, he abhorred the love built upon treason ? The less he felt love himself, the more he needed esteem. Esteem ! And forgery, and trust betrayed, and confidence deceived, rose before him in their black array. To these he was wedded. He bit his lip and looked angrily at Mr. Ford.

"Well, sir," he said sharply, "what more do you want?"

"Nothing," answered Mr. Ford; "God knows, I little suspected what I was doing."

Mr. O'Lally's face darkened.

"You come with a strange story," he said, in the same sharp, brief tone. "I warn you that I shall sift it thoroughly, and, until I know more, this house and land are mine, and I give you no credit."

"You will do as you please," replied Mr. Ford. "This house and this land are not yours—they are Mab's; but you may keep them if you like. I have told you I will not go to law with you—I have saved up some money for her, and she can live without O'Lally's Town. So far as I can see," continued Mr. Ford, bluntly, "ill-gotten goods are no great gain to their owners."

Mr. O'Lally looked sternly at him ; but Mr. Ford's blood was up—he thought of Mab, and would have snapped his fingers at a king in the defence of her rights. Mr. O'Lally, however, did not deign to answer his taunt, and Mr. Ford, having said his say, took his hat and walked out. He felt excited, and the scene he had just witnessed was not calculated to calm him. He walked through the garden and the grounds until he reached the gate that led into the country. He let himself out, and, thrusting his hands in his pockets, walked at a swift pace, talking and muttering to himself. A rustling sound made him look round ; it was Annie's silk dress, and close behind him stood the unhappy lady. She wore a small velvet hat and feather ; her dress was elegant and tasteful, the attire of a rich woman, who, though alone, is protected by the respect and deference of all ; but Mr. Ford needed no second look to know that she had left her husband's house for ever. Annie Gardiner was terrible to look at in her despair. Her eyes were sunken, her lips parched and parted,

her brow rigid. The sight of Mr. Ford seemed to rouse all her passion once more.

"I told you you would be my ruin," she said, "I told you you would. When you first entered that house I felt misery and woe coming in with you—it is written in your face, it is; and now you will go back to her—she will triumph in my humiliation, and boast that she still rules the heart of my husband; let her—he is my husband—and until I die, mine, and not hers. Even now, tell her that even now it is a sin and a shame for her to think of him."

"God forgive you—God forgive us all!" said Mr. Ford, with a heavy heart.

"How dare you ask God to forgive me?" she cried, turning upon him. "How dare you? I will not be pitied! Pity me if you dare!"

Mr. Ford would pity, and he would counsel too.

"You are very young," he said gently, "all cannot be over between Mr. O'Lally and you."

A gesture full of scorn was her answer.

"I have forbidden you to pity me," she replied; "and I now bid you pity yourself. You were born for your own undoing, Mr. Ford, and for the ruin of all who come near you."

She did not wait for an answer, but, brushing past him, walked on, and struck into a narrow path. Mr. Ford made no attempt to follow her. There was a sting in her last words, and in his inner heart he felt their bitter truth. Ay, that was his destiny: to mar where he meddled, and ruin what he loved. Who knew it better than John Ford?

CHAPTER VI.

EXACTLY a week after his conversation with Mr. O'Lally, Mr. Ford made his appearance in Queen Square. He came in the evening, and found Mab sitting alone in the drawing-room. She looked both pensive and melancholy, and Mr. Ford now knew why she looked thus. His heart ached as he gazed on her sad face, which the joy of his return only lighted up a while, and his courage sank as he thought of all he had to tell her.

"Mab, my darling," he said, with a sigh, "play me something."

Mab's heart felt very heavy for music, but she obeyed. She played Mr. Ford his favourite piece from Mozart. When the

last notes of the *Agnus Dei* had died away, Mr. Ford sighed again, and said, "Mab, come here!"

Mab went, and thought to sit by him, but he motioned her away.

"Not there," he said; "no, on the other side of that table. Mab, I have much to say to you."

There was a pause; then Mr. Ford resumed:

"Mab," he said, "have you ever wondered who and what you were? Have you ever conjectured what your real story might be?"

Long as Mab had been with Mr. Ford, this was the first time that this subject rose between them. She looked up suddenly, but his eyes were downcast and shaded by his hand, and his face gave her no clue to his meaning.

"I have wondered," she answered, "but scarcely conjectured."

"I had," said Mr. Ford; "but no proof, though suspicion amounted to certainty. Now proof has come."

Mab rose to her feet with great emotion.

"Are my parents living?" she asked.

"No: your father died before you were born, your mother long before you were left at my door."

Mab sat down again—all her wild hopes of kindred and affection suddenly quenched within her. The rest seemed a matter of no moment.

"You were born in Ireland, of Irish parents," resumed Mr. Ford, "and your name is Mary O'Flaherty, and O'Lally's Town is yours, and never was Miss Gardiner's."

The burning blood rushed up to Mab's face, then went back to her heart, and left her pale as death.

"I know what you are thinking of," resumed Mr. Ford; "yes, it was Mr. O'Lally whom you knew as a child before your mother died. I told him so, and he still remembered you."

Mab pressed her throbbing forehead between her hands.

"But why was all this?" she asked; "why was I left at your door, cast on your charity?"

"Hush! for God's sake!" he interrupted. "I will tell you all, but do not use words like these—words that kill me. If you had had none but that Irish property, such as it is, I dare say you would have been allowed to enjoy it in peace; but an aunt of yours married a rich Englishman to whom I was related—his name was George, and the Georges were his nearest relatives. But old Mr. George—for he was old—was not fond of them, and he left every farthing he had to his young wife. She

died soon after him, and bequeathed all she had to you, and in case you died before coming of age, to her husband's nearest relations, Captain George and his brother James."

Mab looked up.

"Yes," said Mr. Ford, "that is it. Three men were interested in your death—Mr. Gardiner, whom it would entitle to the property at O'Lally's Town, and the two Georges; and these three men found means, which I never was able to clear up, to make you pass for dead in the eyes of the law. They plundered you, and it pleased Providence that they should do so with impunity. In a carriage, bought with your own money, Mab, Captain George drove up to this door, and, in deep mourning for you, he gave you a doll. I believe that was the man's way."

"But, uncle," said Mab, almost incredulously, "how could they do all this?"

"God knows! I do not, child. I have spent years to discover it, and I have learned little or nothing. They were cunning as well as strong. They gave legal proof of the death of a consumptive child, and they said that child was Mary O'Flaherty, the heiress. There was no one to gainsay them, to investigate, or to inquire, for no one had any interest in the matter; and so Mr. Gardiner got the land, and the Georges the money."

Mab's face fell.

"Uncle," she said, sadly, "there is some mistake—I am not Mary O'Flaherty. I am Mab Winter."

"You are Mary O'Flaherty," replied Mr. Ford, very drearily. "Captain George never actually denied it, and he confessed it to me the other night on his death-bed. You are Mary O'Flaherty, though to this day I cannot prove it. And yet how I did search, Mab!—but they were too cunning for me. I never had a chance of justice. Oh! Mab, it has been very hard to see them enjoying and squandering your wealth. Well, they did not thrive upon it. How could they? Captain George died the other day in a garret, and you know his brother's end. With him perished his accomplice, Mary——"

"I remember Mary," interrupted Mab.

"Yes, it was she left you at my door. They bought her too. You may well look frightened, Mab. You did not know what money could do—how far it could sink souls into sin. It is frightful—it is very frightful! But the curse of gold rested on them all—on them all, Mab. It rested upon them in life as in death. I have always suspected that the wife of James George was his accomplice. Well, husband and wife thought it necessary to use

Mary, and what happened? Mrs. George was middle-aged and plain, and Mary was young and handsome. Her master liked her, and her mistress did not care to complain. A rival, insolent and strong, rose up in her own home, and literally broke her heart. And the curse of gold fell on them too. Mr. George took a journey to India, and whilst he was away his daughter was born. He could not come back, and by marrying the mother make this, his only child, his lawful heiress. That child was the only creature he ever loved; he could leave her money, but he dare not acknowledge her—he dare not be proud of her, and she promised to be beautiful. Well, she was innocent, and therefore God was merciful to her, for she died young and escaped it all. You know how Mary and her master ended. It was hard to see Captain George enjoy what was left of your plunder, but I had to bear it, Mab. Well, he repented in some fashion, for it is thanks to him that you now have O'Lally's Town."

"What!" cried Mab.

"Yes, it is yours now. I would not have gone to law about it, but I told Mr. O'Lally your story, and, Mab, behold God's justice! He bade his attorney tell me that your claim was just, and that papers which had come into his possession by marriage, proved it to him beyond a doubt, though never before had he been able to understand their meaning. Yes, Mab, I have that triumph at least. O'Lally's Town is yours."

And rising, Mr. Ford walked about the room in his old way. But Mab looked both grieved and indignant.

"It is his," she said; "he bought it—it is his!"

Mr. Ford stopped short, and looked at her.

"Mab, do not wish him to keep it—the iniquity that clings to that house and land has brought ruin with it. Mr. O'Lally is all but a penniless man—I know it through Doctor Flinn—through every one. His marriage has proved his undoing—for it has given him a new set of enemies in his wife's relatives. All his enterprises have failed one after the other. The red house is shut up, he has sold his wife's land to pay his debts, and the greatest of all his misfortunes is having that wife herself. When I went to O'Lally's Town, some years ago, Mr. O'Lally was going to marry your cousin and namesake, Mary. Miss Gardiner, the worthy daughter of a guilty father, forged a letter that divided them. I tell you, Mab, it is God's justice. I went on your business again, and I exposed her. I neither wished nor meant it, but I did it, and she has fled from her husband, and no one knows where she is now. They have not been married six

months, and they are divided for ever; and through whom, Mab?—through you—through you!”

He spoke excitedly, but Mab, though bewildered at all he said, had but one prevailing thought.

“Uncle,” she asked, “where is Mr. O’Lally?”

“God knows, child; he has left both O’Lally’s Town and Ireland, but no one knows where he is. He has taken his sisters with him—did I tell you they are both insane?”

Mab clasped her hands with something like despair. Mr. O’Lally was poor, forsaken, afflicted, and it was in the hour of his adversity that her claims had been urged to deprive him of his home.

“Oh! uncle,” she cried, “how could you do it?—how could you take his last refuge from him—that house which his sisters bought for him—which was truly and really his?”

“It is yours, not his, Mab,” rather sharply answered Mr. Ford; “and it has been yours all these years.”

“Oh! why did you not tell me so before?” she cried. “Oh! time, time, why was I denied a little time?”

She threw herself across the table, and clasping her hands above her head, moaned aloud in the bitterness of her grief. Pitifully did Mr. Ford look at her. He knew the meaning of her reproaches, and he felt them in all their keenness. At length Mab looked up; she rose, she came to his side, and she spoke in a tone both humbled and penitent.

“Uncle, forgive me, but it put me beside myself to think of what might have been; besides, I cannot bear robbing Mr. O’Lally. I cannot bear it. Forgive me speaking so hastily, uncle, pray forgive me!”

“Forgive you! Oh! Mab, if you knew all.”

“Uncle, what can there be to know? You may tell me what you please now. I can defy the rest.”

Mr. Ford sighed.

“Mab,” he said, “you had three enemies. I told you so. You had a fourth, too. Well, the curse of ill-gotten gold has fallen on him also, Mab. Oh! Mab, do you know who that fourth enemy is?—Mab, his name is John Ford.”

“You, uncle!—you!”

“You do not ask why you were left at my door! I believe you owed that to Captain George. Bad though the man was, he would not cast you forth as a beggar on the streets. So you were left on the steps of this house, with five hundred pounds pinned to your cloak. It was a time of bitter need for me, so I

was tempted, and I yielded to the temptation. Early investigation might have availed. I made none. I sought to know nothing. When I repented it was too late, I was in their power, and they could defy me, as they did. Thus you see, Mab, how my guilty weakness made me your fourth and most terrible enemy. And now, Mab, you know all, or almost all, and the end has come, and I have lived to see you partly righted, and, God help me! to feel shame before you. It does not matter; I am used up now, and shall not last long. It was *that* kept me up. You will never know how I toiled to repair my error. Now I am helpless. I can see that my wrong-doing has deprived you of more than an inheritance. I suppose it interfered between you and Mr. O'Lally. Robert, too, was false to you. Like father, like son. Your happiness is wrecked, Mab. Your cry for 'time! time!' has pierced my very heart. Poor little Mab! He who seemed to cherish you was your bitter foe. Oh! Mab, how was it? What was there between you and Mr. O'Lally?"

"For God's sake, do not question me!" cried Mab, "do not—do not! I am wretched—very miserable, and I do not know what I might say in the bitterness of my heart. Do not question me."

There was a long silence. Whilst it lasted Mr. Ford drank the dregs of the bitter cup he had been slowly quaffing since the day when his wife had died. Mab felt resentment against him. He had wronged her cruelly, and she had suffered cruelly, and resentment, natural though very hard to bear, had entered her heart. Everything else he could have borne; this, though anticipated, he found intolerable. He rose to leave the room, but Mab rose too, and, throwing her arms around his neck, said tenderly,

"Dear uncle, do not mind me—do not! Only I cannot bear it about Mr. O'Lally—it breaks my heart."

Mr. Ford hung his head and sighed. Had he given years and sleepless nights!—had he watched and prayed, and hoped against all hope—and all to work out this atonement—and was it to end thus? Was his darling to be none the happier for all striving? Was she to utter those cruel words, "It breaks my heart"?

"Uncle," she asked after a while, "are you sure no one knows where Mr. O'Lally is gone to?"

"Yes, Mab, very sure."

She sighed, kissed him, and went up to her room. When she came down the next morning she was much more calm.

"Will you like to live at O'Lally's Town, uncle?" she asked.

Mr. Ford brightened up at once.

"I shall like any place where you are," he replied cheerfully.

"It will be farther from the boys, uncle."

Mr. Ford shook his head.

"The boys have left the nest, Mab. It is all over between them and me—all over."

Thus it was decided. A bill was put up in the house in Queen Square, and Mab and Mr. Ford left it on a chill and cheerless morning.

They travelled slowly, and four days later they arrived at O'Lally's Town. Mab was not expected, and the house was shut up. A wintry sun lit its gloomy front and shone on the window panes. A messenger had been sent for the keys, and whilst they waited his return Mab and Mr. Ford sat down on the steps of the front door. Mab remembered her arrival, her aunt, and the smiling twin sisters. Where were they now? One in her grave in the mountains, the other two, clouded for ever in intellect, poor helpless women, were wandering somewhere with their brother. And where and what was he? A wrecked man of twenty-seven, foiled in ambition, in marriage, and in love. And where was Annie Gardiner, the once handsome heiress, now a rejected, unloved wife?

"Oh, life! life!" thought Mab. "And I am not twenty-one!" was her next inward cry.

"Here is some one coming," said Mr. Ford. The garden gate opened, and Honour, for whom a boy had been despatched, appeared with a bunch of keys in her hand. She came slowly towards them. As she walked up the path between the two lawns, Mab noticed the constrained and clouded expression of her countenance. "Poor girl," thought Mab, "she cannot find it in her heart to welcome me." Very cold and awkward indeed was Honour's greeting, and especially did it include much unnecessary explanation about the keys, one of which was unaccountably missing; "but it will be found, Miss," very earnestly assured Honour.

The door was opened, and they entered the house. Honour threw back the shutters, and the pale sunlight poured in, and lit up the chill, gloomy rooms; nothing was changed. A look told Mab that Mr. O'Lally had left everything behind him. She

found his books, his guns, his fishing-rods; she found his sisters' little knick-knacks in their rooms; she found his wife's room, too, as that wife left it on the evening of her flight, with a dress thrown on a chair, and the toilet-table still covered with its dainty fittings out, bright and sparkling in their bridal newness.

Involuntary jealousy filled Mab's heart. Oh! how soon and how manlike he had given her up for another! And had not that other been loved, even though it were only for a day, whilst she bore her hard fate alone? Ay! a few days Annie Gardiner must have had; "and I," thought Mab, "had I ever a moment that was not embittered by remorse or fear?"

"Does any one know where Mrs. O'Lally is now?" she asked, turning to Honour. "I should like to send these things to her."

"No, Miss," replied Honour, looking hard at Mab, and speaking slowly; "but I don't think she wants any of these dresses and things where she is."

"What do you mean?" asked Mab, much startled.

"Why, Miss, I only say what other people say, that Mrs. O'Lally threw herself into the bottomless loch; and some say that she did it that her body might not be found, and her husband never be able to marry again."

Mab turned sick and faint, and leaving this dreary room, she locked it, and resolved to enter it no more.

"And now," she said, carelessly, "I want to go out by the sea awhile; give me the key of the garden gate."

Honor handed it to her with a compassionate look. It was not hard for her to read the story of Mab's pale face and sad eyes. She had seen her fresh and gay as the morning go out to the sea-shore to meet Mr. O'Lally—for what do not servants see and know? and now sad, dispirited, and wan, what was she going there for but to torture and vex her own heart with the memory of what had been and could be no more.

She went, she ran through the garden alleys, with the eagerness of long-repressed desire; she opened the door with a trembling hand, she looked out at the full green sea beating with its edge of foam against that desert shore. In the fulness of her grief she called aloud, she bade him come. It was not Annie's husband she wanted—he was dead to her, dead and gone; it was Mr. O'Lally, her lover, by whose side she had sat, in whose hand her hand had been clasped, who for a few days at least had been her own, fond, adoring, and true—hers as she had been his. But it would be too sweet if passion could deceive us, and keep us in

that high mood akin to madness in its delusions, though not in its horrors. Cold, keen as the chill sea-breeze which blew around her returned reality. Willingly, deliberately Mr. O'Lally had set between them an impassable barrier—his ill-fated marriage divided them for ever, and bade her forget. "And I must, I must," thought Mab. "Oh! that God would give me strength!" Sadly, humbly she turned back. As she entered the garden, she met Mr. Ford, who had come looking for her, restless and uneasy.

"I wanted to look at the sea, uncle," said Mab, trying to smile.

"Dinner is ready," replied Mr. Ford, looking at her very earnestly.

She went in with him, and forced herself to eat a little, in order to please him. Night had set in. There was a bright fire in the sitting-room, and Honour brought in the moderator lamp, and set it on the table. Mr. Ford drew close to the fireside and rubbed his hands, and tried to look cheerful. Mab stood by his side silent, and, as he could see, very sad. He did not question her, but he watched the direction of her eyes—they were fixed on a print above the fireplace; and how deep and intent was their gaze. He, too, saw the likeness, and though he could not know how vivid a picture of another evening that image brought back to Mab, he felt it was not to O'Lally's Town she should have come if she wished to forget.

But did she wish to forget? Alas! no, it was too true that in her heart of hearts Mab wished to remember.

CHAPTER VII.

It was thus Mab had settled in her new home. She was coldly received at first, for her story was thought strange and doubtful; but as time passed the prejudice against her gave way to sympathy, and in several instances to admiration, for Mab was young, good-looking and not poor, but vanity and its pleasures were dead, and Mab remained at home and led the dullest of dull lives whilst years went by.

Mr. Ford was disappointed. It was hard that Mab would not marry.

"That is what she wants, you see," he reasoned with himself. "I am no society for her, of course not—a dull, broken-spirited old man, what should she care for me? She is fond of me, dear

little Mab, I know it, but I am not enough for her. She wants a husband, another Mr. O'Lally, a home and children in it. What a pity she can fancy none of these fine young fellows who are all after her! There are two or three of them a good deal handsomer and more agreeable than that Bonaparte O'Lally; but it's all fancy, you see—all fancy, and she had set her fancy upon him. I wonder if she would like young Norton? She used to like him."

Mr. Ford set his wits to work, and they worked to such purpose that before the month was out Frederick Norton had made his appearance at O'Lally's Town. Mab's reception of him was cordial, though to her his visit was unexpected, but Mr. Ford's was enthusiastic. He looked at him with admiring and delighted eyes, and no sooner did they remain alone after dinner than Mr. Ford's attack began.

"Now, Mr. Norton," he said, in his jaunty way, "just taste that Bordeaux, and tell me what you think of it? Let me tell you the mistress of the house has a pretty good cellar, though the little puss will not taste anything herself but water."

Without waiting for the guest's reply, Mr. Ford filled his glass and drained it. Doctor Flinn had ordered him to take wine, for he had shown signs of great debility, and the result was that Mr. Ford sometimes forgot his old sobriety.

"How do you think Mab is looking?" he resumed.

"Miss Winter—Miss O'Flaherty, I mean—will always look well."

Mr. Ford bowed his head, and his tears flowed.

"Marry her, Frederick," he said, plaintively. "Robert was a villain, and she was too good for him. But you are a good fellow, Fred—I like you—marry her, she is as handsome as ever, if you look at her well. Why, all the young men here are mad to have her, and she is rich now—marry her, Fred, there is a good fellow!"

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Ford," rather sharply replied Frederick Norton, "for your good opinion of me, but I can read a woman's face now, and Miss O'Flaherty's is not to be misunderstood—I do not know if she will ever marry, but I am very certain I should not be the favoured man."

"You cannot say if you will not try," plaintively urged Mr. Ford. "I wish you would try, Fred. Push me the bottle."

But Fred, who began to perceive how matters stood, denied Mr. Ford's request, and insisted on joining Mab, who merely

noticed Mr. Ford's prudent silence, and fortunately remained unconscious of his real condition.

By the next morning Mr. Ford had forgotten how far he had gone, but he had not forgotten his secret purpose. To heighten Mab's charms, he took Mr. Norton over the estate, and whilst he pointed out fine views and romantic scenery, he dropped broad hints concerning the rent roll; but Frederick Norton heard him with polite indifference—he had not grown mercenary. Mr. Ford took other means. He left him alone with Mab. He stole away on shallow pretences, chuckling, with his hands in his pockets, and taking care not to come back.

This plan, old-fashioned and worn-out as it might seem, nearly proved successful. Involuntarily Mr. Norton felt the seduction which a once loved woman rarely fails to exercise over a man's heart. Mab was altered, she had lost the rosy bloom of early youth, but she was lovely still, and she had gained charms more subtle and more delicate than those of which years had robbed her. How dreamy and how soft was the look of those large dark grey eyes, that ever seemed to be seeking a lost image; how tender a grace there lingered in her smile, how sweet were the tones of her once gay voice! Ay! Frederick Norton soon felt it, the woman who had loved and suffered might be more dangerous than the blooming and thoughtless girl. The temptation of consoling so fair looking a mourner came over the young man's still susceptible heart. Once or twice he looked at Mab with that dawn of tenderness which is not beyond respect, but which no woman mistakes. The sudden cloud that crossed her face, the pain, the constraint he read there, confirmed him in what he had said to Mr. Ford. He was not to be the man, and as with the knowledge of reading feelings had come that prudence which is the guard of strength, he promptly resolved to shorten this dangerous visit, and escape his threatened relapse. A letter came. Frederick Norton pleaded urgent business, resisted all Mr. Ford's outcries and laments, and was gone ere he had fairly recovered from so severe a blow. With a darkened face, Mr. Ford turned back towards the house, as the wheels of the jaunting car rolled away along the road.

"Oh! Mab," he exclaimed with a reproachful sigh, "Frederick would have stayed if you had liked. I am sure he loves you still."

Mab did not answer.

"Mab! Mab!!" excitedly cried Mr. Ford, "are you engaged to him? Say you are, Mab. Oh! say you are!"

"Dear uncle," replied Mab, laying her hand on his shoulder, and looking kindly into his face, "I am best so—I have not rejected Mr. Norton—he has not asked me—but I shall never marry."

Mr. Ford's face fell.

"Uncle," said Mab, trying to look cheerful, "I am going to Shane's Country, will you come with me?"

"Not yet, Mab," he replied in a tone she could not misunderstand, "but I shall go some day. There's room by Lavinia's side."

He walked away, and Mab sighed.

Old times were with her, as she went up the lonely path that led to her aunt's last resting-place. Her very heart was stirred as she entered that quiet domain of the dead, and walked amongst the green hillocks. It was wrong—it must be wrong to be thinking of him so much, but she could not help it. Her whole heart pined for some news and token of his being. That he was far away, somewhere in France, she knew, but she knew no more; and though she did not ask to see or meet him again—that would not be right—she longed to know that he was prosperous, honoured, and, so far as his hard lot allowed it, happy. That was all she wanted, and Providence denied it.

When Mab reached her aunt's grave, she was at once conscious of a change around it. Something had been disturbed or removed. She looked, and perceived that Mr. O'Lally's family vault must have been opened and entered recently. She approached the large square stone that covered it, and a freshly carved inscription met her view. It ran thus:

R. I. P.

EMILY AND ELLEN FORD.

Born April the 15th, 18—.

Died May the 1st, 18—.

"They were lovely in their lives, and in their deaths were not divided."

So they were dead. One day had given them birth, one day had seen them die, one grave had received them. And who had laid them in that grave? Ah! she could not doubt it. The brother whom they had so fondly worshipped, and who, in the darkness of their last days had so faithfully remained by them, making himself their keeper and their consoler, would not have left so sacred a care to the hands of strangers. He had brought

them back from their home in a country more favored by heaven, but not more tenderly loved than theirs, to the graves of their kindred, to sleep their last sleep in Irish earth. Mab's tears fell like rain on that cold stone which covered the gentle and good. They had not loved her, but she did not remember that then; she forgot that, in the blindness of their affection, they had hastened the ill-fated marriage of their brother. She only remembered that they had been true to him and infinitely dear; she remembered, too, that he had suffered as he stood by that grave and saw it close on the only two beings he now could or must love—and remembering that, she grieved with his grief. Another thought came as she left Shane's Country. Was he still in the vicinity? She did not think so, but she longed to know, and, instead of going home, she made her way to Miss Flinn's.

Miss Flinn had never been fond of locomotion, as she said herself. She now hated it, for she had grown stout. Thus her friends had to call upon her or to give her up. Miss Flinn declined paying visits, she called it a piece of dreadful nonsense, but, absurd though it was, tolerated it when she was to be the recipient, and not the giver. Mab, though a rare visitor, was always a welcome one, and particularly cordial was the greeting she now received as she entered Miss Flinn's parlor. It was cordiality, however, in which reproach blended.

"Now, how long is it since you showed your face here?" asked Miss Flinn.

"Six weeks," was Mab's prompt reply; "and it might have been seven if I did not want you, Miss Flinn."

"That is candid. And what do you want me for?"

"The family grave of Mr. O'Lally has been opened lately," said Mab, in an unsteady voice.

Tears suddenly rose to Miss Flinn's dark eyes.

"It has, Miss O'Flaherty," she replied; "the two sisters died on the same day—Miss Emily in the morning, and Ellen at night, just before twelve. A sore blow to their brother. Poor fellow! How he did love them, poor silly women!"

"And have you seen him, Miss Flinn?"

"Yes, child, I have—for half-an-hour; for I need not tell you he did not remain in this part of the country. He looked well, but worn. He was to sail the next morning for America. He means to buy an estate, and found an Irish settlement. He is as full of energy as ever."

"Does he mean to return?"

"I suppose I may tell you," replied Miss Flinn, after a pause. "A year after Mr. O'Lally left us, and you came, he received a letter from his wife, enclosing a certificate of the birth of their child, a boy, born a few months after her flight, and informing him that, do what he might, and search as long as he would, he should never see either her or the child. He found means to ascertain that her statement was true, and she was even traced to New York; and now he has gone himself, in the hopes of finding her and the child, and he never means to return to this country. I always disliked that Annie and her sullen black eyes."

Mab did not answer. She pitied and she hated Annie; she pitied her for having been driven from doting affection to such implacable resentment, and she hated her for the new thorn she put into Mr. O'Lally's lot. Oh! it was cruel to let him know the child was born, only to torment him, and it was terrible to think such love should end thus.

"Miss Flinn," she said, after a pause, "did Mr. O'Lally leave you no message for me?"

"My dear Miss O'Flaherty, he did not utter your name. That you were in his thoughts I am certain, and surely you cannot doubt—but how could he speak of you?"

Mab did not answer, but her clasped hands twitched nervously.

"Poor little thing," thought Miss Flinn, "I wonder he did not marry her, she was much the nicer girl of the two—and she is fond of him still."

"What! going so soon?" she exclaimed, as Mab rose.

Mab smiled drearily.

"I came for news," she said, "and you had none to give me. You may look at me, Miss Flinn, I have no pride—none, but I can bear my fate, so do not pity me."

"And when will you come to see me, then?"

"To-morrow."

Mab kept her word. She came the next day, and she was calm, serene, and cheerful. Grief had gone back to the depths of her heart, and was once more buried there.

And still time passed, and Mab's quiet life daily grew more calm. She was not happy, but she had ceased to suffer. She was resigned to her lot, such as it was, and thankful for its many blessings. Sometimes, indeed, life felt cold and dull, and there was a great void in her heart—that void so hard to fill in youth, especially when youth has known love and passion, and lost both; but she

took interest in many things. Her mind, matured in solitude, gave her, in the quiet pursuit of study, pleasures of which her eager youth had only tasted, and there were moments when she was surprised to feel how very sweet life could still be. She did not forget Mr. O'Lally—she thought of him daily, constantly, but without bitterness, and with ever decreasing regret. Hope was dead, and there is a portion of love that cannot survive hope—that purer part, in which no thought of self mingles, was still living, and strong in Mab's heart.

But these were feelings Mr. Ford could not understand. Mab was not what she had been, and she would never marry—she had said so. He brooded over her sorrows with the morbid intensity which years of suffering and remorse had bred in him. He exaggerated not their reality, but their force, for he forgot that Mab was young, and that youth cannot always suffer. Mab had happy moments, of which he knew nothing. She had walks on the mountain side, and solitary rides in the valleys, that filled her heart with peace and sweetness. She had cares, too, in the little world around her, that softened the bitterness of her own troubles. She had Nature, earth and sky, and the wild sea and her shores for her comforters. Sometimes, when she came in blooming and almost cheerful, and met him with a smile, Mr. Ford's face brightened. He looked at her as a faithful dog watches its master, and he loved her with something of a canine affection, and for a moment he felt glad; but oftener, when Mab was grave and thoughtful, as she generally was now, Mr. Ford's face fell, for he remembered her gay as a lark, and happy as the day was long. The hopeless change was too much for a mind and conscience long diseased by the severest struggles. Mab had been the darling of his heart; to see her righted, rich, and happy, had been the aim of his life, and now he knew it, on her own confession, she would never be happy, and it was all through him. His mind, which had never been strong, and which a prevailing thought had weakened, daily grew more feeble. At length he ceased to think, he only felt; the long flickering flame of life which Frederick Norton's visit had kindled anew, all but expired in its socket. His prophecy that he should not live long was thus fulfilled. He lived indeed, but almost as one dead. To look at Mab, to wander about the house, to hold in his hand a newspaper which he never read, and, when the day was fine, to sit in the sun, was now the daily life of John Ford. He seldom spoke, and in all, save his bodily presence, Mab was indeed alone.

Doctor Flinn, when consulted by Mab, assured her that Mr. Ford's state was the loss of strength, and that he would rally yet; but he could not move her uneasiness, and one morning that Mr. Ford looked particularly ill and feeble, she sent for Doctor Flinn in great haste. He came sooner than she expected him. Had she reflected, she must have known that her messenger had not reached him, but she did not think of that, and at once explained the cause of her uneasiness.

"I saw Mr. Ford as I came in," replied Doctor Flinn, "and I thought he looked well enough—he is not a strong man, Miss O'Flaherty."

"I wish I could give him some of my superfluous strength," sighed Mab, "I have no use for it."

"Yes, you seem in very good health indeed, Miss O'Flaherty; and allow me to tell you that you have got back all your good looks since you came to Ireland. How long have you been with us?"

"Four years—I am twenty-five now—quite old."

"Oh! quite," replied Doctor Flinn; "Miss O'Flaherty, it is a shame that you will not marry—Miss Flinn always says so."

"Tell Miss Flinn not to provoke me, else I shall marry you, Doctor Flinn."

"I wish you would," he replied, with great alacrity.

Mab laughed. She looked well, merry, and handsome. Doctor Flinn looked at her keenly. "It is all over," he thought, "and it is time it should be too," he added. And as he had something to tell Mab, something she should know, and which it was very hard to relate, he slowly rubbed his nose, and began rather wide of the mark.

"By the way, why do you not travel, Miss O'Flaherty?"

"I do not care about it, Doctor Flinn."

"Well, I do not know but you are right; travelling, is awkward for ladies; even men do not always manage it well. Did you ever hear from Mr. O'Lally?"

"Never," answered Mab, "I should like to know how he is getting on with his settlement in America."

Doctor Flinn rubbed his nose again. She spoke very quietly, without the old emotion, without a blush or a sigh. He could tell her.

"I have heard about him," he said, "and—they were not exactly good news."

"How so?" asked Mab.

"To be frank, I called on purpose to tell you—I was afraid you might read it in some stray paper and get a shock."

Mab played with her chain, and did not answer a word.

"Mr. O'Lally is dead," said Doctor Flinn, with much emotion.

Mab's hands still played with her chain, but her eyes grew fixed, her lips turned white, and her cheeks were covered with a livid pallor. Doctor Flinn rose alarmed, and wanted to ring the bell.

"Do not," she said, in a low voice, "it is over now. Doctor Flinn," she added, looking at him with a smile, "he is not dead—but do not give me such a shock again, you would kill me."

"My poor child," said Doctor Flinn, "I wish I had known as much as I know now ere I had told you."

"He is not dead," persisted Mab.

Doctor Flinn felt too much pity for her despair to argue with her; but his silence said much—too much. Ay, all was over: the struggle to forget, the resignation, the calm endurance were over! He was dead!

CHAPTER VIII.

SEVERAL weeks passed before Mab could ask Doctor Flinn to tell her all he knew. It was little enough. Mr. O'Lally had scarcely reached America when he had been seized with a fever, which proved fatal. Doctor Flinn had received the news in a letter which he showed Mab. She read and returned it without a word; but he saw that the battle she had nearly won was lost once more. Mr. O'Lally was no longer the man whom conscience and pride alike bade her forget; he slept in a remote grave, forgotten and uncared for by the generation around him; there was no one to dispute her claim to him now—he was hers.

A stranger would have seen no more than gravity in Mab's face, but Mr. Ford read its meaning.

"Oh! Mab, will nothing ever please you again?" he plaintively asked one day.

There are moments when the truth, even though bitter and best unspoken, will escape from our lips. Mab could not be silent then.

"Never!" she exclaimed; "never, uncle, it is all over! I can live, I must live, but all pleasure, all joy is dead in my heart."

"You cannot tell," meekly rejoined Mr. Ford; "I felt that too when Alicia died—it was a long sorrow, and yet I outlived it—and my other troubles had nothing to do with that one—and yet it was a great one! Oh, I thought I should go mad the night Alicia died. You see it was such a blow—but I forget you don't know it—it is too long to tell, besides I am not sure I could—but oh! Mab, she was my wife, and your trouble is not what mine was. And I wish, I do," he pettishly added, with his old wrongheadedness, "I wish you would try and forget that Mr. O'Lally—who, after all, married another."

"He married another, but he loved me," said Mab, with a rising colour; "and, uncle, it is useless to argue with a grief like mine—I can never be happy again—never, for I must live without him." And her lips quivered as she uttered the passionate declaration.

"Shall we go to Miss Flinn's?" asked Mr. Ford, quite subdued.

"As you please."

They went, but the road that led to Miss Flinn's never brought cheerful thoughts to Mab, and her face was rather sadder than usual when they entered Miss Flinn's parlour.

They found Miss Flinn in a great rage, and not without cause. She had just received a letter, and what a letter! There never had been anything like it.

"Read it, Miss O'Flaherty," she said, putting it into Mab's hand; "read it, and tell me if it is not just like her."

Mab took the letter, and looked at it—it bore a foreign post-mark, and ran thus:—

"MY DEAR MISS FLINN —When you receive this I shall be no more. You might refuse the living, you will not refuse the dead a last request. For the sake of old times, have mercy on me—take my child! God's hand has been heavy on me. I am dying, and I am all but destitute—my friends in Ireland are estranged, and I would rather leave my darling to the kindness of strangers than to theirs. I leave him to yours, and to Doctor Flinn's. The curé of the little village where I have been hiding for the last three years will tell you where to find him. For God's sake, take my child! Of course I only mean for a time. His father will be but too glad to have him now. Do it, Miss Flinn, as you wish to find mercy some day.

"ANNIE GARDINER,"

The letter dropped from Mab's hands.

"I never heard anything like it!" cried Miss Flinn, looking from Mab to Mr. Ford, and from him to Mab again; "there is that Mrs. O'Lally leaving her child to *me*, who hated her."

Mab took up the letter and read it over in silence.

"She did not know her husband was dead," she said, returning it to Miss Flinn.

"What have I to do with their child?" cried Miss Flinn, looking exasperated. "Miss Gardiner did not dote upon me, I can tell you, and I do believe she singled me out of spite. As to her, 'of course I only mean for a time,' it is all nonsense. Her husband is dead, and her own friends have left the country, as she knew quite well, I'll be bound. But Annie was always sly. Well, here's news for Doctor Flinn, who always comes in and says, What news, Bridget? A pretty long face he will pull when I tell him this."

"Uncle," said Mab, rising and looking at the sky, "I see a storm coming on."

"Very well, my dear, we shall go."

They bade Miss Flinn a hurried adieu, and left her, still amazed and very indignant at their sudden departure. Of course she knew what it meant—they wanted to keep out of it.

As soon as they were out of sight of Miss Flinn's windows, Mab stopped short, like one out of breath.

"Uncle," she began.

"I know," he interrupted, "you want the child."

"Uncle," she exclaimed, clasping her hands, and speaking with sudden energy, "I think that if I had the child I could be happy again."

"You shall have him," cried Mr. Ford. "I will go back and ask the direction from Miss Flinn, and start at once. You shall have him, Mab, if I have life and strength to get him for you."

He was going off, but Mab detained him.

"Uncle, I know the direction," she said; "it is Varnes, near Dieppe, and I saw, too, on the corner of the other page what Miss Flinn had not seen, that Mrs. O'Lally called herself Mrs. Brown—that will guide us."

"Are you coming with me, Mab?"

"Yes, uncle; I would not let you travel alone, in the first place, and, in the second, I could not stay behind. Oh, that we might leave to-night!"

"I am ready to go," eagerly said Mr. Ford.

"No, uncle, you shall not travel at night, but we shall both leave to-morrow morning; for suppose anyone else should get the child—I do not mean Miss Flinn—but any one else."

"It is not likely any one would have him, Mab."

"Oh! uncle, who knows? There are plenty of rich childless people who would be glad of such a child."

"I suppose so."

"You see, uncle," said Mab, stopping short again, "that child will be a new life to me. I could scarcely keep in whilst Miss Flinn was talking so strangely, and I left because the first thing is to get the child—after that I can say what I please. Uncle, I was mad when I told you I should never be happy again—I am afraid I shall be too happy—if I can only have him."

"There is no fear about that, Mab."

"Ah, uncle, you cannot tell—happiness has always fled before me—what if this should melt away before I can seize it?"

Mr. Ford looked at her wistfully; for many a long day he had not seen Mab so. When they came within view of O'Lally's Town, she looked at her house with a kindling eye.

"I am glad it is mine now," she said, pressing Mr. Ford's arm to her side, and looking round in his face with tears in her eyes and a bright smile on her lips, "I am glad I have money and land, for if it often made my heart ache to think I took them from Mr. O'Lally, it will be a great joy to give them back to Mr. O'Lally's child some day."

"Mab, you will spoil him."

"No, uncle, but I shall love him dearly. He shall have a pony—he must be manly. And Father Macarthy, the Benedictine monk, shall teach him, for his father was learned, and so must he be."

Mr. Ford heard her, and shook his head, but Mab went on with undiminished ardour, and the whole day and the whole evening she could speak of nothing else. But when the morning came Mab was in a high fever, and Doctor Flinn declared there was but one cure for her: to get the child.

"And must I leave Mab so?" plaintively said Mr. Ford.

"My sister shall come and take care of her."

Mr. Ford sighed, but it was for Mab's good—he must yield. However, and with his old secretiveness, he chose to leave the house by stealth, and it was only when he had been gone some hours that Mab, to her despair, learned his departure. Doctor Flinn, who witnessed the outburst of her grief, prudently concealed his share in the transaction, and left to Miss Flinn, who

had taken up her domicile at O'Lally's Town, the task of administering consolation.

"Oh! Miss Flinn, you do not know uncle," replied Mab; "it is a long journey, and he will stay some time away and not write—he never does; and knowing him to be weak both in body and in mind, how shall I bear his cruel silence?"

She had to bear it, however, for, as she had foreseen, Mr. Ford did not write. A week passed, then ten days, and still no tidings came of him. Mab's excitement now gave way to a deep and silent apathy, which made Doctor Flinn regret more than ever the advice he had given Mr. Ford. He was doing his best to cheer her one evening, the twelfth that followed Mr. Ford's departure, and Miss Flinn was seconding him, when Mab, who sat by the fireside listening to them with closed eyes, suddenly looked up with a start. She had heard carriage wheels, but they had not.

"Take my word for it, Miss O'Flaherty," said Doctor Flinn, "Mr. Ford will drop in upon you when you least expect it. I only hope the surprise and joy will not be too much for you."

The carriage wheels were drawing nearer, Mab heard them distinctly.

"But I do hope, Miss O'Flaherty," said Miss Flinn, "that if you feel hysterical you will check the tendency. Hysterics are most dangerous—"

"Miss Flinn!"

"It is no use looking daggers at me, Doctor Flinn. You know well enough that, once a woman has had hysterics, she has them her whole life long. And, therefore, check the tendency, I say."

Mab shaded her eyes with her hand. The carriage had stopped; he had come home safe, but had he brought the child? Doctor Flinn and his sister were silent; they too had heard it, and they saw there was no need to prepare Mab. Though she did not stir, though she did not remove her hand from her eyes, her whole attitude bespoke expectation deep and breathless.

The door opened, but Mab did not look. She heard Mr. Ford's step on the carpet, but it was only when his voice said "Mab," that she removed her hand. He stood on the hearth before her smiling, and in his arms a boy of three lay fast asleep.

The scene Doctor Flinn had feared did not take place. Mab did not indulge in the hysterics against which Miss Flinn had warned her. Deep peace seemed to enter her troubled heart—peace so deep, that joy had scarcely room left.

"Uncle, dear uncle," she softly said as she rose and kissed his cheek, "how could you leave me!"

"Here he is, Mab," replied Mr. Ford, handing her the boy, who was wakening slowly, opening wide his deep blue eyes, Mr. O'Lally's eyes, and looking around him with grave wonder; "here he is, take him and love him—take him and love him," repeated Mr. Ford, whose heart was rather full, and needed the repetition of the homely phrase.

Mab took the boy and set him on her knee. He had his father's eyes and his father's finely-cut features, softened by the grace of infancy.

"What is your name, darling?" she whispered softly.

"Johnny," was his prompt reply.

"John O'Lally, say."

"No—Johnny."

"There was not much trouble in getting him," said Mr. Ford, sitting down. Poor Mrs. O'Lally was dead and buried—I saw her grave. She left nothing—no papers, the curé said, only a little money. I told him to give it to the poor. But I brought the child's clothes."

Mab looked at him sadly. He spoke in his old dreamy way, the energy, the will her strong desire had wakened in him were gone—to return no more. Here Miss Flinn rose, and beckoning to Doctor Flinn, who obeyed the signal, she quietly left the room. Mab remained alone with the boy and Mr. Ford. He watched her wistfully. She looked at the print above the fireplace, then at Johnny, who seemed still lost in serious astonishment; then drawing him closer to her, she embraced him fondly, whilst tears—not all of sorrow—fell on his brown curls. Mr. Ford was sitting opposite her with his hands on his knees. Mab smiled at him: a bright, almost a happy smile.

"Yes, uncle," she said, answering his look, "that is it; I could not have the father, but I have got the child."

CHAPTER IX.

THE springs of life are very strong when the twenties are not over yet, and the calm sober regions of the thirties is still closed and unentered ground. There are but few tokens of sorrow upon Mab now. These signs may come later, the impatient and restless look, the absent smile, the weariness of all things which speak of a life disappointed and of broken aims—all these may

start up into sudden life, even as the autumn weeds, the after growth of the garden, appear there when the sweet spring and summer flowers are gone. But Mab's first summer days are still in their prime. What though the spring-time was sad and clouded, what though one great hope was wrecked for ever, the sea of life has many shores, and some of these are very pleasant, even though they are so far away from the rosy islands of love.

It was very sweet to have Johnny all her own, to teach him his letters, to play with him, to run with him along the garden paths, or sit with him for half a day at a time on the grass. Sometimes Mab and the boy walked together hand-in-hand by the sea-shore. She picked up shells for him, and helped him to gather sea-weed; she watched him splashing barefoot in the edge of foam, hunting the crab, the star-fish, or the sea anemone, and in her heart, and not without some sadness, she wondered at the fate which brought her there with Mr. O'Lally's child. Though her vigilant looks never left him, Mab's thoughts were not always with Johnny. She remembered other days than these, when the green waves beat against the long brown shore, and a lost voice spoke in language it was very sweet to hear. Then for a while the old fever would waken, for Mab was still young, and youth thirsts for happiness. Oh! how greedily, if it but had its way, it would drink its fill of the sweet draught, and drain the cup, and leave not a drop behind for after-years. But Providence is wise in its severity. If those eager desires could be sated thus early, the rest of life would seem too flat and dull. It is right, therefore, that our covetous hearts should be stinted. Thus we learn to fight the battle of life, and reach the great goal, and win the last victory.

It was the sweetness and the charm of this new love of Mab's, that at once, and as if by magic, it had softened all bitterness out of the past. No sooner was Johnny in her possession, than Mab went herself and opened Mrs. O'Lally's room. With her own hands she carefully put away all that had belonged to the dead lady. Was she not Johnny's mother, and might he not some day value these memorials of her? Her next act was to cause a plain but substantial slab of marble to be placed over Annie Gardiner's last resting-place.

"My Johnny's mother shall not sleep in a forgotten grave," she said, fondly pressing him to her heart.

She forgave the dead Mrs. O'Lally, and what was harder, she forgave the living Robert. He was a widower now, with one child, a girl, named Alicia, said to be like Mr. Ford's dead

wife, and they were both in England, and Mab read in Mr. Ford's wistful eyes that he longed to see his son and his son's child. She could not deny his saddened age that solace. She wrote a kind forgiving letter of invitation; and when Robert's answer of acceptance came, she put it into Mr. Ford's hand. His cheek flushed, his dull eye brightened, but he could not speak.

"Uncle," said Mab, "I shall be jealous of Robert."

"Don't," he entreated; "you know I always loved that boy. He was so handsome, so clever, and so good. I was proud of him, and what father would not have been? But he never cared much about me. I deserved it—only it was hard."

"Deserved it!" indignantly cried Mab. "Oh! uncle, do not make me say harsh things of your son."

"No, do not, Mab," beseechingly said Mr. Ford; "I could not bear it. Robert was his mother's darling, and his faults, I have no doubt, sprang from the bad rearing I gave him."

Mab would not argue. It was Mr. Ford's destiny to blame himself, and to suffer to the last.

More than she would have liked to say did it cost Mab to see Robert again, but when she saw Mr. Ford leading a fair-headed, blue-eyed child by the hand, and looking with loving eyes at his eldest and still eminently handsome son, she neither could nor would repent.

The meeting between her and Robert was friendly and calm. She went out to him with Johnny clinging to her, and she welcomed him as freely as if bitterness had never risen between them. Of the two Robert seemed the more affected. Mab was struck with his sunken eyes, and wearied, unhappy look. Heart-ache had been busy with him, she saw.

"Robert, are you really well?" she asked.

He did not answer. He was looking at Johnny.

"It is Mr. O'Lally's child," said Mab.

"I understand," replied Robert, sharply.

"Yes," said Mab, proudly, "I might have been his wife, but for you."

Her eyes flashed, her lips quivered, as she recalled her cruel wrong. But she soon calmed down, and, holding out her hand, said, in a friendly voice:

"Forgive me, Robert, I have grown hasty, as you see. But I cannot always bear to think of the past. I have not been happy, nor, in many respects, have you?"

"Happy!" and for the first time his lips quivered, and the

working of his features betrayed genuine emotion. "My wife never forgave me the affection I once bore you, and my brothers the wrong you had endured from me. I believe my father once resented the influence I possessed over them; he need not do so now. Of him they speak with affection and respect, of me—but no matter. I have not seen them these two years, and if I have left Australia, it is that they made the country too bitter for me."

"Ah! they should never have forgotten what they owed you," cried Mab, moved, as she remembered the past.

Robert seemed unable to pursue the subject, and it was not renewed whilst he remained at O'Lally's Town.

He left rather suddenly one morning, but Alicia remained behind. Mab could not resist Mr. Ford's pleading eyes; he was the child now, and it was her part to guard and indulge him. Robert, on being asked, seemed glad to leave Alicia in Mab's care, and to comply with her wishes.

As suddenly as he had left did Robert return, and Mr. Ford, convinced he had come to take away the child that had already wound itself around his heart-strings, piteously appealed to Mab.

"Mab," he said, "keep Alicia, I have not long to live—keep Alicia for me."

"I will if I can, uncle."

"Of course you can, but you are so wrapt up in Johnny that you do not think of Alicia, or of me now, and you do not know how dear a child she is."

He spoke quite querulously. Mab's heart smote her. Ay, she was making an idol of Mr. O'Lally's child, and old affections were cast into the shade by that new love. Ah! she could not help it, he was both himself and his father too; but yet it was wrong, and she would shew it so plainly no more. Her cheeks burned as Mr. Ford taxed her thus plainly with a preference she could not well deny; but she tried to laugh, and told him he should see how she would plead and keep Alicia for him.

She lost no time in taking out Robert into the garden, and in preferring her request.

"Dear Robert," said she, putting her hand on his arm, and looking kindly in his face, "I cannot part with your child. See, how well she looks now! You must leave her to me for the sake of old times—leave her, at least a little longer, Robert."

Robert looked very much embarrassed.

"You must not say me nay," persisted Mab. "You must not, indeed. I must have Alicia for another while."

"Indeed—" began Robert.

"No objections," said Mab, putting her hand on his lips, and trying to laugh; "you owe me that, Robert—ask your conscience if you do not."

"Alicia shall stay if you wish it," said Robert, taking her hand, and pressing it to his lips before he released it, "but will you always wish for it, Mab?"

He looked and spoke rather sadly.

"Why not?" she asked.

Robert did not reply at once. They were walking down the garden path: with his cane he idly struck the boughs of the shrubs near him.

"Now, Mr. Ford," said Mab, arresting his hand, "please not to play King Tarquin with my flowers."

Robert ceased, and stopping short, he said:

"You do not ask what took me to London."

"Business?"

"Yes, Mab, business. I went to know whether I am to live or die, and I have had my answer. Poor little Queen Mab, how shocked you look! I should not have told you so abruptly. But it is so. And, Mab," he added, "you will let me die near my poor father and you, for the sake of old times, and you will keep Alicia—as long as you like, Mab."

Still Mab was silent. She heard him—she even believed him, but she could not realize that Robert was doomed, that his life, though so short, had already reached its utmost limit. It was a bright clear day; the blue sky, the warm sun, the green earth, the gay shouts of the children at the other end of the garden, spoke of life, ever full, ever young. How could Robert die?

"Robert!" she cried at length, "it is impossible."

They had reached the pond, and Robert, taking some crumbs from his pocket, began feeding the swans.

"Mab," he suddenly said, "Mab, do you remember our villa on the Thames?"

Mab looked at him, unable to speak.

"There were to be roses in it, roses which you were to tend, and swans which you were to feed."

Still Mab could not say one word. The past he recalled rushed back to her with so much force that she felt like one

choking for want of breath. Robert looked at her tenderly and pityingly.

"Poor little Mab," he said softly stroking her hand, and drawing her arm within his, "poor little Queen Mab, I should not have spoken of that. I did not think you still cared so much for me."

"Robert, dear Robert," she cried, throwing her arms around his neck, "you shall not leave us. We will not part with you. You are mistaken—you are not so ill. God will not inflict on us that last bitter grief."

Her words were broken by sobs. Robert sighed. Very dearly he looked back over the vanished years.

"Poor Mab, poor little Queen Mab!" he said again, and his hand smoothed the golden hair of the head that lay on his shoulder, "what a dreadful mistake the past has been! And yet—you would never have been happy with me, Mab; it was like the villa on the Thames, and the roses and the swans—a thing to dream of, and never to come to pass."

"But you are not so ill," persisted Mab.

"Well, perhaps I am not," replied Robert, cheerfully; "I made the doctors tell me the worst, for I have much heavy business to settle—but perhaps I am not so ill."

"I am sure you are not!" cried Mab.

"Granted. And now, Mab, suppose you guess what brought me home so suddenly to-day."

His tone was strange.

Mab felt startled. She tried to read his face, but it told her nothing.

"Well," she said, "what was it?"

"No selfish purpose. I came here for you, Mab, on an errand you little suspect."

Mab turned pale as death. His looks, his words flashed a sudden conviction through her heart.

"Mr. O'Lally is living," she cried.

"Who told you so?" exclaimed Robert, amazed.

"I knew it!" cried Mab, in an unutterable transport; "I never believed in my heart he was dead—never! Oh! Robert, where is he?"

"In America, I believe."

"If he were at the end of the earth, he loves me still. Oh! what have I done that God should be so very good to me!"

The wildness of her joy alarmed Robert. He tried in vain to calm her. Mab did not heed him. She walked up and down

the garden with clasped hands, uttering breathless ejaculations. At length she ceased—she sat down on a garden chair—she buried her face in her hands, and long remained thus. When she looked up, her cheeks were covered with tears.

“God knows best,” she said, “I thought him dead, and it was for a wise purpose; I learn he is living, and I am glad. If he were estranged for ever from me by other affections and other ties, I will still be glad. You shall tell me all later, now I could not bear it. I only will rejoice that my darling has got back his father.”

Robert looked at her rather wistfully. He measured the depths of that unselfish love which no woman had ever felt for him.

“You do not ask how the fact of Mr. O’Lally’s life came to my knowledge,” said Robert.

“Robert you say it, and I feel it is true—you would not deceive me.”

“No—but do not expect him just yet, Mab. He is far away, and the last news of him are a year old. A Mr. Sims, with whom I have business in London, mentioned him to me, and even entrusted me with this.”

He handed her a letter as he spoke. Mab recognised Mr. O’Lally’s handwriting, for, though he had never written to her, she had often seen it, and it was a peculiar hand, bold and clear. The letter was a mere formal and business acknowledgment of another letter received, but it was signed in full, “JOHN O’LALLY.” Ay, he was living a year back at least, and that first report of his death was a cruel and bitter error. Mab laid her two hands on Robert’s shoulder, and looking in his face with glistening eyes and quivering lips, said,

“Oh! Robert, dear old Robert, I must love you again like the Robert of old times. And you shall live, Robert, I am sure of it. We have both suffered for our sin; for I, alas! would have been faithless to you, but for Aunt Lavinia. For his sake I would have done what you did for William and Edward. I loved him beyond my own truth and honour, and therefore was the hand of God so heavy upon me. But Heaven is very merciful: you see he is alive. And I have written to your brothers, and my heart tells me they will come back to you humbled and penitent.”

“They will come back when all is over,” thought Robert, but he would not sadden her, and he asked what she would do.

“I shall write to him to-night,” she answered.

"He may have left the place whence that letter is dated. Mr. Sims says he is never stationary."

"Then I shall not merely write, but advertise."

She spoke without doubt or fear. Neither could mar her pure joy. She was sure he loved her. What matter that years had passed since their parting? Happiness is measured, not by its duration, but by its depth and sincerity. They would put all theirs in what yet remained of life and youth.

"Auntie!" cried Johnny's joyous voice from the end of the garden.

Mab turned round her bright face.

"Ah! he must know his father is living," she exclaimed; and leaving Robert's side, she hastily went to meet her darling. Robert watched them from afar. Mab was seated on a bench, and Johnny was on her knee; she was telling him the wonderful story, to which he listened with open mouth and eyes. The narrative ended in a long caress, and this in tears. Robert drew near them, and he heard Mab say soothingly: "Hush, my darling, your father is coming back—you must be glad, you must not cry. He must find you brave and strong, and be almost as proud of you as you always will be proud of him."

Robert walked away pensively. Ay, this was the true love, the true worship which neither absence nor time could destroy. He met his father, who, holding Alicia by the hand, had been hovering uneasily about.

"You will not take her away, Robert, will you?" he asked, pleadingly.

"I did not come here for that," replied his son; and he briefly told him his errand.

Mr. Ford at first remained mute, then he wondered if it could be true, and when convinced on this head, he said thoughtfully:

"Mab will be very happy now. I never knew a love such as is hers for that Mr. O'Lally."

"Yes," replied Robert, with a sigh, "that is the love which one woman in ten thousand feels, and which all profess to feel."

CHAPTER X.

EVERY great joy has its wakening. Mab's wakening came six months after Robert had brought her the happy tidings. Her letters—for she wrote more than once—her advertisements, had remained unanswered. She long resisted the conviction that

Mr. O'Lally was as much lost to her as if the dark stream of death had flowed between them. She long indulged herself with day-dreams and endless conversations with Johnny, her only confidant on this subject; but there came a day when hope acknowledged herself vanquished, when the joyful light left Mab's eye, and she became the Mab of the old sad days before Johnny had come.

But she was not long indulged with a purely selfish grief. Slow was the fulfilment of Robert's prophecy, but the London doctors had not deceived him; though slow, it was sure. Mr. Ford saw and suspected nothing. "Robert had never been strong," he said, and Mab shrank from the task of enlightening him. She could not inflict that cruel blow on the old man. He was fortunately too much wrapped up in Alicia to notice anything. She was seldom off his knee, rarely away from his side. He appeared to feel for her a sort of childish love, and she for him a grave, tender, and most unchildish affection.

They were all thus one afternoon—Alicia on Mr. Ford's knee, Robert reclining in his chair with closed eyes, Mab sitting by him sewing, and listening to Johnny's shouts of joy in the garden, when the long silence, for no one spoke, was suddenly broken by Robert.

"Mab," he said, "is it not strange that you have never heard from Mr. O'Lally?"

"We must wait, and trust to Providence," replied Mab.

Robert looked at her and sighed. No one could mistake the sad meaning of Mab's face. Ay, Mr. O'Lally was living, and he would return some day, but he would come when the last bloom of youth had fled. He would come when hope, weary of waiting so long, would be cold and dead, and then he would take away the joy of her life; he would claim the child, and Mab would remain alone and forsaken.

"Poor Mab!" sighed Robert, "poor little Queen Mab, what an ending!"

There are moments when it is very hard to be pitied, when it is more than we can endure. Mab could bear her burden in silence, but some things she could not hear spoken. She threw her work down, and, rising, abruptly left the room.

"What ails Mab?" asked Mr. Ford, who seemed to waken up.

"Nothing—but there are no news of Mr. O'Lally."

"Mr. O'Lally! then he is not dead! Ah! no, I remember. And she wants news of him."

"Poor Mab!" sighed Robert, "it were better I had never told her he was living."

"Yes, why did you tell her?" rather querulously exclaimed his father. "She was well and happy until you came and told her."

Alicia seemed frightened at the sharp tone of his voice, and softly laid her cheek to his; he kissed her, and spoke no more. Soon after this he left the room. When Mab entered it Robert was alone, and he was sleeping in his chair. How grey and worn looked his poor face in the twilight—the handsome face on which Aunt Lavinia's eyes had so often dwelt with fondness and pride. And it would soon be over; the end was coming on. As assuredly as morning yields to noon, and noon to night, so would his little span of life close in the calm evening of death. Ah! if the death which is unforeseen is terrible in its suddenness, how terrible too is that of which we can almost tell the day and the hour! Death, the fate of all, comes to some as the thief in the night; it is then the stealthy assassin who bides his hour. But to others it is as the inexorable judgment of the law to the condemned—the execution without reprieve or hope.

Whilst Mab was thus gazing on him, Robert awoke suddenly.

"Where is my father?" he asked eagerly.

"I saw him in the garden. How do you feel, Robert?"

"As usual, thank you. Did he take Alicia with him?"

"No, she is here."

"I wish he had taken the child," uneasily said Robert.

Mab wished it too when she found that Mr. Ford did not return. He did not come back that day nor the next. He was traced as far as the railway; there all signs of him were lost; and weeks passed and brought no news. Both Mab and Robert felt convinced that he had gone to seek for Mr. O'Lally, a wild, vain search, that made Mab's heart ache doubly. If she had been more calm and more patient, Mr. Ford would never have left home. These thoughts oppressed her one evening as she sat with Robert. She felt very sad as she looked at his pale face resting on the white pillow in his chair. A few days more, and that face would be at rest in a cold dark bed; above it the heavy earth would lie, and pitiless wind and rain would sweep unheard and unfelt. Mab's heart felt sinking. She had borne much in her short life; death, partings worse than death, abandonment, treachery, solitude, and now she was called upon to bear more. Robert was dying, and his father was away, uncared for in his weak old age. She longed for Mr. Ford's return, and she dread-

ed it. Yet it would be very hard if he came back unprepared, and found his son's chair vacant for ever.

With the secret sympathy which exists between persons who live much and closely together, Robert who had sat silent for a long time, now roused himself and said suddenly, "I wish my father would write."

"He never used to write when he was away," replied Mab. She stopped suddenly, and started to her feet. She had heard Mr. Ford's voice in the hall, and before she could reach the door, it opened, and he entered.

"Oh! uncle, dear uncle!" she cried, clasping him in her arms, and forgetting everything in the joy of his return.

Mr. Ford embraced her with a sigh, and gently putting her away, he sat down in the chair she had left vacant. The firelight played on his face, and Mab was struck with his worn and wearied look. He sat, his hands on his knees, his eyes fixed on Robert. But it was to Mab he spoke.

"Mab," he said, in a childish, pitiful accent, "I tried very hard, but I could not find him."

"How is Alicia?" were Mr. Ford's next words; but he still looked at Robert with an anxious glance.

"Alicia is well, uncle. What will you take?—are you not tired?"

He made a gesture of impatient denial.

"I have heard from your brothers," he said, addressing his son; "they are in England, in the north, and they will come and see you in a few days. They will come by the *Mermaid*, they said."

Robert's face lit, then fell again.

"Poor fellows!" he said; "I shall be gone then, and it will only grieve them."

"Gone!" repeated Mr. Ford. "What is he saying, Mab?"

"Do not mind him, uncle, Robert is low."

"Mab, where is the use of deceiving my father any longer? I am dying, and I know it. It is time he should know it too."

Mr. Ford rose to his feet, rigid and pale.

"Dying!" he said, "dying, Robert!"

"Yes, and it is time I should go before poor Mab is quite worn out. But I am sorry you came back so soon. It is a useless grief."

Mr. Ford stared at him, then at Mab, then sank down on his chair without a word. He remembered his wife's death-bed, and mechanically he repeated her moaning cry: "The sins of guilty

parents are visited on their innocent children—it is Bible truth, it is Gospel truth!”

“Uncle, dear uncle, do not say that!” exclaimed Mab, who understood his meaning but too well.

Mr. Ford sighed and shook his head.

“The end is coming,” he said, drearily; “the end of all, Mab.”

She stooped and kissed him. His tears were flowing slowly along his withered cheeks. There was no violent grief, no burst of passionate sorrow; but there was, and Mab knew it, the sense of a deep humiliation, of a just though chastening hand.

“How the wind is rising!” said Robert.

It was rising indeed, and very drearily it came from the north-west, blending with the surge of the Atlantic.

“God help those at sea!” continued Robert, with a sigh; “their death must be very bitter. Mab, I think I shall go to my room.”

They helped him up-stairs. They laid him in the bed which had been Miss Lavinia’s, and Robert left it no more.

The end came on the third evening after that of Mr. Ford’s return. Mab sat by him, remembering Miss Lavinia’s pale face as she lay in that large square bed. The same heavy curtains hung around it still. They looked a hundred years old at least, and might be so. Beneath these massive damask folds had already flourished, faded, and died three generations; they had witnessed Miss Lavinia’s agony, and were now to behold that of her darling. He lay with closed eyes. Mab sat near him, looking at him, and listening to the wind. It howled dismally round the old house—for the last three days it had not ceased its sullen moan. Robert, too, heard it, for he said, with a sigh:

“What a night! It would have spoiled all the roses in our villa, eh, Mab?”

“Robert, dear Robert, say something else! Do not talk of that!” she entreated.

“Poor Mab! Why will you grieve so? It is not hard to die. I assure you it is not. When the time has come—what o’clock is it?”

“Half-past seven.”

“Well, then, before nine strikes it will all be over, and when the time has come, I shall turn to the wall, and heave a sigh or so—and that is all, Mab.”

Mab half rose to call Mr. Ford, but she sat down again. He had left the room because he could not bear the sight—why com-

pel him to return? Besides, who knew but Robert might live days yet? There was a large, old-fashioned watch on the table. Its monotonous ticking fell painfully on Mab's ear. Every second seemed struck by the hand of Death. Mab looked at it with nervous emotion. An hour passed, then it was a quarter to nine; now it wanted but ten minutes, now only five. She looked at Robert. He was sitting up in bed. He looked at her, and seemed striving to utter words that would not pass his lips.

"Robert, what is it?" she asked.

He tried to answer, but she could not understand the incoherent sounds that passed his lips. She thought later that he had said "the sea," but she did not receive that impression then—she received none. He sank back, turned to the wall, sighed, and died as calmly as a child falls to sleep.

Mab felt wonderfully composed. She went out for his father. They met on the staircase.

"All is over!" she said to him.

And he mechanically repeated after her, "All is over!"

They entered the room together. A beautiful and holy calmness had already settled on Robert's face. His father stood and looked at those serene marble features, that recalled vividly the dead Alicia. He turned to Mab, and said in a whisper,

"He is like his mother."

Then he sat down in Mab's chair, and remained there watching the whole of that long, dreary night.

It would have been useless to argue with him, and Mab did not. Besides, there was a steadiness and tranquillity in Mr. Ford's grief that silenced argument. He sat looking at his son, but he shed no tears, he uttered no laments. When he spoke, it was to say with a calm sigh:

"The Lord gave, and the Lord took away." Or, "God is just."

Mab sat with him. Her chair was at the foot of the bed. She could see Mr. Ford's bent figure; his hands resting on his knees, his head half sunk on his breast, his eyes fixed on the pale face before him. And heavy though the shadow of the curtains was, Mab saw the pale face too. Wonderful and sweet was its beauty. It was the immortal image of the living man; the handsome and imperious features were now clothed with gentleness and repose. Suffering, indeed, had left its lines there, but it was the suffering we see painted in dead saints and martyrs—something holy beyond mere mortality. If lingering resentment for a great wrong endured, and a wasted youth, had

remained in Mab's heart, it vanished for ever during the silent vigil of that night. Seeing him thus with God's seal on his brow, how could she remember Robert's sins ?

A few days later Mr. Ford's eldest son was laid in Shane's Country, near his aunt Lavinia. As the coffin was lowered into the yawning grave, and the first shovelful of earth fell upon it, Mab heard Mr. Ford mutter :

"The sins of the parents—" then he broke off and looked at her drearily.

Alas ! if he had known what Mab knew ; if he had known that this grave, which now held his eldest son, was in reality the grave of his three children ! If he had known that the missing *Mermaid* would never come to port, or be heard of more !—that she was gone for ever, with passengers and crew, another of the thousand mysteries of the ocean ! But the cloud which had fallen on his intellect spared him that pang. Mab kept the dreary secret well. She followed Robert to the grave, and her sorrow was not for him. She thought of two who were drifting away in the deep sullen waves of the sea, whom the earth would never receive or be called on to surrender. Her childhood, her youth, this dead one's love and pride for them, the ingratitude which had stung his heart, the love which had survived all, were with her all the way, and nearly overpowered her, but strength was given her from above to bear without betraying what the old man was never to know.

They were sitting together on the evening of the funeral. The greyiness of the day had melted into rain. Alicia, whose pretty pale face bore the traces of bitter tears, had crept up to her grandfather's knee ; Mab kept Johnny quiet, and the room was very still, when suddenly looking up, Mr. Ford said, in his natural voice :

"My dear, do you not think William and Edward will come to-night ?"

Mab's left hand was resting gently on Johnny's shoulder. The child felt her grasp tighten, and he gave her a half-frightened look, but, with a calmness that surprised herself, Mab answered,

"No, uncle, we must not expect them."

But he persisted with the obstinacy of a child.

"When do you think they will come, Mab ?"

"Uncle," she answered, still very calmly, "I leave all to God."

"You do well, Mab, you do well."

He said no more, and, sitting thus, Mab could think over her

now destiny, for it seemed to have entered another phasis. Robert and his two brothers were dead, and every link in her young life was rudely torn. He who had loved her once, probably no longer loved her now, and at least was absent, cooled by years, if not estranged. What, then, was her fate? —to sit thus with a half-witted old man for her companion, to rear the children of the man and the woman who had robbed her of happiness.

A strange and sad destiny! But her own words came to her, "I leave all to God."

CHAPTER XI.

ROBERT has been dead five years. Mr. Ford, Mab, and the two children are sitting in the old room. It is a clear and frosty day without. The sun is shining on the sparkling earth, still white with snow. Within it is warm and pleasant. Mab sits by a window sewing. Time has passed over her; it has spared much, but much too has it taken away. For ever is gone the smiling bloom of youth, and that light from the spirit within which it gives to a girl's face. Mab is not a girl now, and she knows it; she is a woman, calm and thoughtful, who has suffered and gone through her sorrow bravely, and come out triumphant indeed, but, being human, not unharmed. On a stool at her feet sits Alicia, sewing too. Alicia is fair and pretty, quiet, but not joyless; there is a steady grace about her, such as might beseeem a young nun, yet there is nothing unchildish or that would misbecome her years. Farther on, near a broad table, Johnny, now tall and strong, sits studying hard, for Father Macarthy, the Benedictine monk, is coming. The book lies open before the boy, his eyes are bent on the page, his cheek rests on the palm of his hand, and his elbow on the table. His thick brown curls veil the broad square forehead, where intellect and will are already written. Now and then Mab looks at him. Now and then she compares his face to that above the mantle-piece, and watches the likeness daily growing more strong between the two. Of the four, Mr. Ford is least altered. Time, that has no longer any mind to wear in him, has spared the body. He sits, as usual, by the chimney corner, looking dreamily at the fire, with his hands resting on his knees. And at him, too, Mab looks with faithful tenderness.

Wise are they who can "leave all to God," and if Mab's

heart sometimes belied the words her lips had uttered, these words none the less became a reality with time. The five years that had passed and brought no change in her life, had at least given it a great calmness, which covered all things, as smooth water sleeps over the secret storms beneath. The very hopelessness of her lot had one blessed result—it made her forget herself; when memory and thought would only have been useless torments. She had to think now not merely of the two children left to her care, but still more of Mr. Ford. She returned to his old age the tenderness her youth had received, and he clung to her with the imploring fondness of a child. If Alicia was his darling, Mab still ruled his heart, and it may be that with all her passionate love for Johnny, that weak, half-childish old man held the first place in hers. They both had suffered keenly, and their sorrows, though not the same in circumstances, were similar in feeling. With both it had been love possessed and love lost, and the great blank which follows that heavy grief. One keen grief Mr. Ford's weakened intellect spared him. He knew that his eldest and most dearly loved son slept in the grave at Shane's Country, but he often querulously wondered why William and Edward never came, and he spoke of the lost *Mermaid* with impatient wonder. "Where could she be all this time?—he had never heard of such a steamer—where was she?" Alas! where was she? In the ghostly seas, where dead ships ever wander with dead crews. To hear and answer such questions was at first Mab's severest trial, but time, which had taught her many things, also taught her to bear this.

As they sat thus very silent, and it was rather their habit to be so, Johnny, closing his book, a sure proof that he knew his lesson,—pride would never allow him to leave one unlearned—said suddenly:

"Aunt, do you think my father will come back before the year is out?"

Often and bitterly had Mab regretted the imprudent joy which had made her reveal to Johnny his father's existence. But she had felt so sure that he would come back in those first exulting moments! With a pertinacity she would not have expected from so young a child, Johnny had not ceased speculating on his father's return. She could not tell him that Mr. O'Lally was dead, for he might be living, and she would not strive to make his child forget him. She could only reply as she did now.

"God knows, Johnny, I do not. Your father is a great

traveller," she added ; " we must submit to God's will, whatever that may be."

For resignation now seemed to Mab the great secret of every human life, young or old.

" I wish I were old enough to travel, and go and look for him," said Johnny, with knit brows, for, though docile, the boy was not submissive. Besides, in many a secret conversation held when hope was still young and her own heart overflowed, Mab had raised to worship Johnny's longing for his father. He had, indeed, much provoked her by inquiring whether his father wore a helmet, and putting other questions of the kind, such, alas ! being his youthful ideal of a hero ; but the impression Mab had sought to foster had been awakened, and Mr. O'Lally ruled over the mind and heart of his unknown child, as one clothed in all that graces and dignifies manhood. With an impatient sigh, Johnny, turning to Alicia, exclaimed,

" Come and play, Licia, will you ? "

Alicia looked up from her sewing to Mab, who smiled assent. The work was put by, neatly folded in the work-basket, and the two children went out hand-in-hand.

" Are they gone ? " asked Mr. Ford from the fireside.

" Yes, uncle."

" Then come and sit by me. I want to talk to you."

Mab obeyed at once. She went and sat by him—she passed her arm around his neck and caressingly laid her head on his shoulder.

" Poor little Mab," he said, fondly, " poor little Queen Mab, you still think of Mr. O'Lally ? "

" Yes, uncle, in my prayers," was her calm reply.

" Not otherwise, Mab ? "

" Uncle, it is ten years since we parted."

" Ten years is it !—well, what about that, Mab ? "

" Well, uncle," she sadly answered, " my heart is worn out with the long waiting. Time has done what religion and pride once failed to do. Mr. O'Lally is dead to me, and as one dead I remember him."

" You do not love him, Mab ? "

" Uncle, that is, that must be all over on my side, as I am sure it is on his. I believe I was the great love of his life, as he was the only one of mine. But what of it ?—we were young then ! Youth is gone now."

" Ah ! Mab ! are you sure you would speak so if you saw him ? "

"Uncle, what would he say when he saw me? Am I the young girl he loved? I believe I was pretty then—what am I now? Oh! uncle, there are some things which are not in man's nature, and which no woman must expect. If he had come back five years ago—but why talk of all this?" she added, breaking off with a calm smile, "my own conviction is that Mr. O'Lally is dead now."

Her voice shook a little, but her look remained serene. Without heeding her last words Mr. Ford said querulously.

"Mab, I tell you all would be well if Mr. O'Lally would only come back. And, if I were but strong I would go and look for him for you, Mab."

"Uncle, never say that—you frighten me."

She spoke with the alarm she felt.

"I tell you that if I were but strong I would, Mab," he persisted; "what is the use of all I have suffered and gone through, since you are not happy, after all?"

Two tears slowly trickled down his cheeks.

"I am happy!" cried Mab; "have I not got you and Johnny and Alicia, and a pleasant home of my own. What more do I want, or can I wish for?"

She spoke cheerfully, but Mr. Ford gave her a wistful look, and sighed, unconvinced. Mab spared no pains to seem very happy and cheerful that day. She talked, she laughed, she played on her harmonium, she moved about the house with the old brightness of Queen Mab, and Mr. Ford seemed so pleased that she was thrown off her guard, and forgot her resolve of watching him closely. She left him for a while to take a short walk with the children; when she came in, Mr. Ford's chair by the fireside was vacant.

At once Mab ran up to his room. He was not there. She looked for him herself over the whole house, then in the garden, and could not find him. He was gone then. There was a last hope: perhaps he was at Doctor Flinn's. There was daylight yet; besides, the country was safe. She put on her bonnet and cloak, and left at once. As she reached the garden gate she was overtaken by Johnny.

"I shall go with you, aunt," he said in a manly tone, "you must not go alone."

"Must I not, Master Johnny? Well, you are a protector, no doubt! A real knight—and true."

"So was my father, was he not, aunt?"

"Your father—oh! Johnny, we must not talk too much of him."

And poor Mab sighed with a double misgiving. Johnny took her hand, and they walked on quickly through the silent country.

The afternoon was very calm and still, but of a deadly stillness; for winter is the death of nature—the time when all her springs of life are locked up far from ken in her deep bosom.

The brightness of the morning was all gone; but the snow which lay hard upon the ground gave more light than belonged to the hour of the day, or to the season of the year, early December. Wild, dreary, and monotonous looked the white landscape clad in that ghostly white. The hollows of the plain, and the clefts of the mountains alone, were of a soft dull grey; the sky was heavy and cloudless, and promised more snow for the night. Mab and the boy walked fast. She regretted having him with her. She longed to reach her goal, and find her fears groundless, and be once more by the cheerful hearth. The cold and solemn-looking scene around her had something unfriendly, that depressed her, as a presentiment of evil at hand. Once she stopped to take breath and question her own heart; but what has argument to do with feeling? Nothing could convince Mab that some new calamity was not going to break over her.

She shortened her road, by taking a long narrow lane deeply sunk between high banks of earth, and overshadowed by stately oaks. Their boughs were bare now, no birds sang hidden by green leaves, brooding over happy nests of love; the summer world of humming insects and blooming flowers was cold and dead; the gnarled roots, the black branches, were tipped with snow, the very wind was still; it was the same dreary aspect which she had left behind her in the plain, that again met her here, and saddened her.

The sound of a horse's hoofs on the road above the lane wakened Mab out of her reverie. She stood still, motioning Johnny not to speak, and, listening, she recognised the even, steady step of Doctor Flinn's pony. At once she called out his name; he heard, and answered her with the wondering exclamation:

"Miss O'Flaherty! What has happened?"

"Nothing, I hope—but pray tell me this—have you seen my uncle?"

"I have this moment met him."

"Ah! thank God!" cried Mab; "but where was he going, Doctor Flinn?"

"To O'Lally's Town, to be sure. If you will go back the way you came, you will overtake him easily."

"Thanks—thanks," cried Mab, joyfully. "Good evening, Doctor Flinn."

"Stop," he exclaimed, anxiously, "I have something to say to you."

"Another time," answered Mab; "I must make haste and reach him—he might fall, you know."

"Only just hear me," entreated Doctor Flinn.

But Mab, who never attached much importance to Doctor Flinn's communications, did not heed him now; perhaps she did not hear him, for, seizing Johnny's hand, she ran at a quick pace down the gentle declivity of the lane.

Her heart felt very light and happy. A pale wintry moon had risen in the sky, and looked at them from the end of the lane, framed in by the dark thin branches of the trees. It lit the winding path of snow before them, and as they ran Mab laughed and Johnny shouted. They were out of breath when they reached the end of the lane; they looked for Mr. Ford, but he was not visible.

"Let us sit down and wait for him," said Mab; "he will soon be here."

They sat on a heap of stones placed there to mend the road, and Johnny, who had grown suddenly grave, said seriously,

"Aunt, do you know what I have been thinking of all day?"

"No, Johnny—what is it?"

"When I am older—a man, you know—I shall go and look for my father."

"Oh, Johnny, my darling, do not say so," cried Mab, with sudden fear; "your search would be useless, and to see you go would break my heart. Besides, Johnny, your father would not wish it. Believe me, I knew him well, and his wish, his true wish is, that you should stay in your own country."

"He did not stay in it, aunt."

"Johnny," replied Mab, deeply moved, "he left it because his heart was broken. You have no right yet to know how or why; but what was wise and right in him would be wrong in you."

"I hate Doctor Flinn," excitedly said Johnny.

The abrupt and irrelevant remark startled Mab.

"Why so?" she asked.

"Because the other day he said to uncle in my hearing, 'that Mr. O'Lally who went away.' What right had he to say *that* Mr. O'Lally?"

"None," replied Mab, almost as indignant as the boy. "Oh! Johnny, the world is neither good nor just, and Doctor Flinn speaks like the world. But if you survive me, as I trust you may, remember what I, who knew your father better than any one now living, remember, Johnny, what I say, if there be truth under heaven, it is true that there never was a greater or a nobler being than Mr. O'Lally, your father."

Her voice, which had faltered a little at first, now rose distinct and clear as she vindicated the lover of her youth to his child.

"I know it! I know it!" enthusiastically cried Johnny, "and I hate Doctor Flinn."

"Oh! Johnny, you must not say that—you must hate none. Your father never hated mortal creature; he was far too magnanimous for that."

But Johnny was probably not magnanimous, for he had resentfully begun muttering Doctor Flinn's name, when he suddenly broke off and exclaimed:

"Why, there is uncle!"

They had not heard him coming up to them on the snow-covered ground, and there he stood, within two paces of them. Mab started up, exclaiming:

"Oh! uncle, why did you frighten me so?"

She fondly threw her arms around his neck, then drew back with a low cry. She knew him, but he was not Mr. Ford. The moon was clouded now, but the white earth gave back a faint low light, and even in that subdued glimmer, worn, altered as he was, she recognized him at once. Her brain swam, her limbs shook, and, like one beside herself, she cried:

"Johnny, Johnny, *this is your father!*"

For a moment the boy remained like one petrified, then he sprang forward to Mr. O'Lally's arms, and father and child exchanged a first passionate embrace. But the sudden emotion was too much for Johnny's excitable temperament; he broke into sobs so violent that Mab, alarmed, took him in her arms and attempted to soothe him.

"Johnny, my darling, you must not cry!" she entreated. "It is your father; but you know you expected him this morning—he has come, and all is well—be calm, Johnny, be calm, for my sake. Besides, we must look for uncle."

"Mr. Ford is at O'Lally's Town," said Mr. O'Lally, speaking for the first time, and a thrill shot through Mab's heart, as she heard once more the voice which had bid her adieu in Shane's Country ten years ago; "he went on first to tell you I was coming."

Johnny was trembling violently, as Mab felt, for she held him pressed against her.

"Oh! let us make haste in!" she cried; "something ails the child."

"Let me carry him," said Mr. O'Lally. He raised him in his arms, and, wrapping him in the folds of his thick plaid, walked on swiftly.

Mab preceded him more swiftly still. In a few minutes they reached the house. Still preceded by Mab, Mr. O'Lally carried Johnny to his room, near Mab's, and softly laid him on his bed. The boy was in a burning fever.

Mab gave Mr. O'Lally a frightened glance.

"Pray, do not be uneasy," he said, calmly; "I know something of fevers, after ten years of travelling, and this is the result of excitement—no more."

"I wish to believe you, Mr. O'Lally."

"But you would like to see Doctor Flinn," he interrupted, with his old smile; "I shall go and look for him."

As Doctor Flinn was just then entering O'Lally's Town, Mr. O'Lally's search was not a long one. On hearing what ailed Johnny, Doctor Flinn imperatively forbade his father to go near him.

"You caused the mischief," he said, "do not make bad worse."

Mr. O'Lally entered the sitting-room, and there he found Mr. Ford.

"How did Mab bear it?" he asked eagerly.

"Miss O'Flaherty has good nerves," drily replied Mr. O'Lally; "but the boy is agitated—Doctor Flinn is with him."

Mr. Ford raised his hands.

"I hope nothing ails Johnny," he cried alarmed, "Mab dotes on him."

Mr. O'Lally said nothing. The door opened, he looked round, it was not Mab, but Doctor Flinn.

"I declare Miss O'Flaherty is crazy about that boy," said Doctor Flinn; "he is excited—no more, and she will not leave him just yet."

Mr. Ford looked puzzled, and glanced timidly at Mr. O'Lal-

ly. It was very strange—he knew that Mr. O’Lally was not married, for he had put the question; that on finding an old newspaper with Mab’s advertisement, he had come immediately from the depths of South America, to see Mab, and his child—yet this did not seem much like a lovers’ meeting. Doctor Flinn, too, looked perplexed and disappointed and soon left. The door had scarcely closed upon him when it opened again—Mr. O’Lally had another quick look, this time it was Alicia who crept up to her grandfather’s knee.

Mr. O’Lally had learned from Miss Flinn whose child she was, and, better than that lady had told him, he now realized the life Mab had led since they had parted. Ah! youth and beauty, gay temper and warm heart, was this your destiny?

But Mr. O’Lally was not the man to linger over sad and unavailing thoughts; he roused himself, took a turn around the room, came back, and entertained Mr. Ford with a graphic account of his ten years of wanderings. It appeared that he had been travelling more for business than for pleasure, and that the success which had failed him in his own land had not been wanting in foreign countries. Mr. O’Lally did not say he was a rich man, but it was evident to Mr. Ford that he was so. “He will never marry her,” he thought, and indeed there was nothing in Mr. O’Lally’s speech or manner that betokened thoughts of marriage.

Mab did not come down to dinner. Johnny was still restless, and she would not leave him. The meal went off quietly, and the evening was rather dull and silent. As time passed, and Mr. Ford, accustomed to early hours, grew heavy, Mr. O’Lally smiled and said:

“Do not sit up for me, Mr. Ford, for, to tell you the truth, I mean to spend the night in this room.”

“You will not, go to bed!” exclaimed Mr. Ford.

“I had rather not. Constant travelling has made me restless, and my temperament enables me to do with very little sleep, and sleep to-night I could not, Mr. Ford.”

His keen look wandered around the room expressively. Even Mr. Ford vaguely understood how and why Mr. O’Lally could not sleep on the first night of his return to his old home. The home of his dead sisters, of his dead wife, and his own dead hopes. No, there are places which are not made for peaceful and happy slumbers.

“Mab could not sleep when we first came here,” said Mr.

Ford, slowly rising, and, with a timid good night, he left the room.

Mr. O'Lally remained alone; hours passed, and he heeded them not. The past was with him—the bitter sweet, and tormenting past. It kept him company by that once familiar hearth, in that room, so little changed that it seemed as if his sisters should be sitting in their places, as if Annie's dark face, or Mab's, so girlish and so fair, should appear in the opening door.

Part of the vision came true. The door opened softly, and Mab entered, her finger on her lips, the light of the candle she held shining on her smiling face. If the bloom of youth was gone, its hope and joy were not. She came towards him with light footsteps, gladness beaming once more over her whole aspect. When she stood within a few paces of him, she put down the light on the table, and said softly:

"He is well now; he is fast asleep."

Mr. O'Lally rose with irrepressible emotion. He went up to her, his brow was flushed, a smile of mingled doubt and hope struggled on his lips.

"Mab—Miss Winter," he began, then suddenly ceased, unable to say more. It was her old name came back to him then, and as Mab heard it, ten weary years rolled back to their fountain-head. She was no longer Mary O'Flaherty, to be wooed and won anew, she was Mab Winter, the girl of twenty, and he was young Mr. O'Lally, and it was yesterday they parted in bitterness and sorrow, and now they met again after that dreary night of separation, and love was free. She turned to him; lover or friend, her whole heart yearned towards him in that hour. She did not speak, but there was that in her look and mien that said, "I am yours—take me." And he took her to his heart, and pressed her to it with the love of ten years back.

"Ah! it is too late!" at length said Mab, untwining his arms from around her, and speaking half in jest, and half in earnest.

"Too late!" he reproachfully replied. "Ah! if you loved me half as much as you love that boy upstairs, you would not say it is too late."

Mab turned her flushed face away from his gaze.

"For whose sake did I love him?" she asked.

"For mine," he replied with a secure smile; "for mine, Mab."

"And perhaps I like you now for his, Mr. O'Lally," she said, half stung at his boasting tone.

"Do not say it," he replied, with something like sorrow in his look, "for I might believe you. Ten years was a long trial, yet I should find it hard to be second where I once was first."

Mab looked at the fire, and smiled.

"I like Johnny dearly," she said, "but I like Johnny's father better still."

She raised her fearless eyes full to his; she was still the same Mab Winter as of old—open, frank, and true.

Mr. O'Lally sat down, and, making her sit down by him, he looked at her with the deepest tenderness he had ever felt or shown to woman.

"Mab," he said, taking her hand in his, "I never knew you loved me so much."

"Do not thank me for it," replied Mab, a little sadly; "I cannot help myself. It was decreed in heaven I should love but once, and that this love should last my lifetime—but I could have lived without you," she added, smiling mischievously.

"So I perceive—for you look in excellent health, Miss Winter."

Miss Winter laughed gaily; and let none grudge her that for an hour she felt as young and as happy as at twenty.

They sat up late that night, talking as if their hearts could never cease to overflow, whilst the turf fire burned cheerfully on the hearth of their old Irish home. Happy vigil! all the more blessed that it had been bought so dear.

When Johnny awoke, calm and well, the next morning, he found two happy faces bending over him—one dreamed of since he could think, the other loved since he could remember.

Mr. Ford looked at them wistfully, then stole out of the room unheard and unheeded. On the landing he found Alicia. Childlike, he told her what was passing in his mind.

"Alicia, I have nothing to wish for, nothing to regret now—I shall soon be ready—soon be ready."

And so he will—the signs are on him—the darkness of evening is slowly closing round John Ford.

THE END.

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